

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

WHY I
BELIEVE IN
MRS. E. G.
WHITE



FRANCIS D. NICHOL

**Why I Believe in Mrs. E.
G. White**

Ellen G. White

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About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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By Francis D. Nichol

Some Reasons Why Seventh-day Adventists Believe That Ellen G. White Possessed the Gift of “the Spirit of Prophecy”

[7]

Chapter One—An Unusual People

Anyone acquainted with Seventh-day Adventists will agree that they are somewhat unusual people. It is not that they do strange, freakish, unusual things. They do not. They are quiet, circumspect, law-abiding people, as their neighbors will readily agree. In fact, neighbors generally go further than this and say that Adventists do much good work for the needy and are generally on hand to help when calamity and disaster strike.

Yet, up and down the street and everywhere, people say Adventists are unusual. A little questioning reveals that this unusual quality is the result of certain beliefs they hold. For example, they do not go to church on Sunday; instead, they keep the seventh day of the week, and so go to church on Saturday morning. Again, they believe that the end of the world is near, though they do not set a date for that awesome event. They believe that when men die they go to the grave, there to lie sleeping until the great resurrection day.

And so we might go on listing the distinctive and thus unusual beliefs of Adventists. Perhaps of all their beliefs none is more significant than this: They believe that at the very beginning of their history and for seventy years thereafter—that is, until 1915—God [8] gave to them prophetic guidance through a woman named Ellen G. White. In other words, they believe, in the language of Scripture, that she possessed the gift of “the spirit of prophecy.”

No matter where you turn back through the pages of Seventh-day Adventist church history, you repeatedly come face to face with the name of Mrs. White. No other name is so frequently found and no other’s words are so frequently quoted. It is no exaggeration to say that her words, her counsels, are the mortar that holds together the bricks of the now-substantial and rapidly growing edifice known as Seventh-day Adventism. That mortar is found at the laying of the very cornerstone of the movement. We doubt that anyone who is even halfway familiar with Adventist history will seriously question

this statement, no matter what might be his personal appraisal of Mrs. White.

Hence anyone who is thinking seriously of joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and there is a rapidly increasing number who are thus thinking—will wish to look carefully into the Adventist claim made regarding Mrs. White. If the claim is true, and we sincerely believe it is, that impressive fact should make him quicken his desire to join.

The Prime Question

Now, the question that naturally arises is this: What evidence do Seventh-day Adventists offer in behalf of their unusual claim that Mrs. White possessed the prophetic gift? This question we shall endeavor to answer in the following chapters. But properly to introduce our answer we need to look, first, at the background and the beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a church which today has grown strong and spread far over the world.

Where did the Adventist Church come from? How did it begin? Travel back with us to the opening decades of the nineteenth century, when there developed, first in Europe and then in America, a singular awakening of interest in those portions of the Bible that speak of the coming of Christ and the end of the world. In Europe this awakening was chiefly among ministers and Biblical scholars. It was interdenominational in nature, drawing into its circle a representative group of learned clergy from the major Protestant bodies.

In America the awakening included not only a group of ministers but many thousands of laymen. A conservative estimate of the total was fifty thousand. The key leader in the American area was William Miller, an ex-officer of the War of 1812, who happened to be a Baptist. With him were associated ministers of many Protestant bodies who traveled about, lecturing on the subject of Bible prophecy and the end of the world. The fifty thousand, or more, people who accepted the special preaching that the end of the world was near and that Christ would then come to this world literally and personally, were known as Millerites, because of William Miller's leadership. They really constituted a kind of loose-knit inter-church movement. Miller's study of the Bible prophecies—specifically [Daniel 8:14](#)—

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led him to conclude that a very great event would occur in 1844. He was correct in concluding that the event would be great, but wrong in concluding that it would be the end of the world and second advent of Christ. To be specific, the date of the Second Advent was finally set as October 22, 1844.

[10] Contrary to fanciful gossip and rumor, the movement was not riddled with fanaticism and weird antics, such as the wearing of ascension robes. On the contrary, William Miller consistently denounced all fanatical actions, and the movement, though loose knit, was singularly free from any activities or ideas that could truly be called fanatical. The documented evidence on this is currently available in book form. ¹

At first the Millerite ministers were generally welcomed in the pulpits of Protestant churches because their preaching tended to bring a spiritual revival—and after all, these ministers held regular credentials from their respective Protestant bodies. However, when men take hold of new religious ideas they frequently find themselves out of tune with former associates. This was particularly true of the Millerites. Protestantism in general had come to believe that there would be no sudden, miraculous coming of Christ, to bring an end to wickedness. Rather, there would be a kind of spiritual coming of Christ, that is, a gradual improvement of the world through the coming of Christ's spirit into men's hearts, so that ultimately the whole world would be converted. The Millerite ministers declared, and rightly so, that this was an unscriptural belief, that the apostles and the great Protestant Reformers had never taught it. The avowed goal of this new and disturbing religious movement was to revive the New Testament teaching on *how* the promised better world, the new earth, was finally to be created—in other words, the true Biblical teaching regarding the second advent of Christ. Because of this marked difference of belief, tensions arose, and by the summer of 1844 many who had accepted Miller's teaching found themselves disfellowshipped from their churches.

A person could be a good Millerite without believing that Christ would come in 1844. In fact, certain of them disavowed the time-

¹F. D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry*. See also current editions of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

setting feature. They had in mind Christ's statement concerning the Advent, that though we may know when "it is near, even at the doors," we *cannot* know the "day and hour" ([Matthew 24:33, 36](#)). But despite this fact, critical onlookers naturally fastened on the rather startling point that the majority of Millerite leaders fixed on a date for the Advent, namely, October 22, 1844. And so because Christ did not come on the day forecast, all that Millerism stood for in prophetic preaching was made the butt of ridicule and declared to be false. [11]

The disappointment of the Millerites following October 22, 1844, can better be imagined than described. Unfortunately, some of them were so overwhelmed by the ridicule that now poured in on them from every side—though they had earlier met a certain amount of it—that they gave up wholly their belief in the prime scriptural and apostolic teaching regarding the Second Advent. Millerism, being at best a loose-knit movement, quickly began to fall apart. The major part of those who still held firm took the general position that not only was the preaching in general correct but also the date for the end of the world, except for some small error in computing the time. They believed that if October 22, 1844, was not the right date, then the arithmetic of [Daniel 8:14](#) needed only a little correction. Hence they could hope that a somewhat later date would provide the fulfillment of their hopes. Another factor that tended to hold some of them together was that they had been disfellowshipped from their churches. They had nowhere to go—they were a spiritually homeless people.

Background of Seventh-day Adventists

A separate, small segment of the Millerites, which numbered in its ranks only one of the leaders, Joseph Bates, reevaluated its position and concluded that the basic Millerite preaching as to the Second Advent was truly Biblical. However, in their re-examination of the prophecy of [Daniel 8:14](#) they could see that it described, not the great act of Christ's coming to this world, but His coming to the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary, there to do a final priestly work ere He returned to the earth. As the little group took hold of this new interpretation of [Daniel 8:14](#) it became increasingly [12]

a sharp dividing line between them and the other, much larger, group of remaining Millerites, who kept setting one date after another, only to be increasingly disappointed and disillusioned. Ultimately this major group tended largely to disintegrate and disappear.

Indeed, why did not every trace of the Millerites—composed of Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and other Christian people—disappear? They lived in a doctrinally hostile religious world. Other Christian people, as already noted, no longer believed even the basic idea of a literal coming of Christ, quite apart from the matter of a date for such coming. Besides, all who believed Miller's preaching were under a cloud of ridicule. Few of them were in the higher levels economically or socially, which might have helped them, in part, to weather the storm.

These handicaps were strikingly evident in the little group who had in their midst only one of the Millerite leaders. On their right was poverty, on their left, derision. They might have been well described as a little ragtag end of a raveled out movement—and all because they had the moral and spiritual courage to re-examine the Bible, particularly its prophecies, and return to the apostolic teaching of the personal, literal coming of Christ. To make their way even more impossible and their extinction apparently certain, some of them, even before the disappointment of October 22, 1844, had begun to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. They found that also plainly taught in the Bible. But in the 1840's there was small hope of holding a job if one were not willing to work from Monday morning to Saturday night.

[13] Yet this little Sabbathkeeping group did *not* quickly disappear from the religious scene, as all the laws of probability demanded. Nor did they linger on, as some religious groups have done, in a kind of fragile, anemic, pathetically reduced fashion. On the contrary, they began ere long to build strategically important institutions—publishing houses, hospitals, schools—and from there went on to develop a worldwide mission work. Their present million and a half close-knit members over the world are often the subject of comment by religious and secular writers who note the efficiency and the effectiveness of the institutions and the program that Seventh-day Adventists carry on. What explains this amazing and incredible phenomenon in the religious world?—for that is exactly what it is.

Chapter Two—Truth, Stranger Than Fiction

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That is the explanation of the survival and growth of Seventh-day Adventism? Why was it that a little religious group, apparently foredoomed to continuing obscurity, if not disintegration and speedy dissolution, became a far-ranging and ever more vigorous segment of Christendom? Some might speak up quickly and say that the group grew because its teachings were true and of God. We heartily agree they *were* true. But that is not an adequate answer. The hard facts of history reveal that there have been groups in the past who held the true doctrine of the literal coming of Christ, only to vanish from the scene. Then there were the heroic Seventh Day Baptists who proclaimed the Bible truth of God's holy Sabbath. Yet they have dwindled almost to the vanishing point. We would not minimize for a moment the fact that the little segment of post-Millerites we are discussing held great truths from God. We only say that that in itself hardly provides a satisfying answer to the question before us: Why did this Sabbathkeeping group grow strong instead of die?

Now comes the most incredible part of all. At first blush, the very answer we are about to give would seem to be the best reason for the speedy dissolution of this Sabbathkeeping subsection of Millerism, rather than its phenomenal growth. But, as the saying goes, truth is stranger than fiction. Certainly it is in this case. Let us explain. Picture a small group of Millerites at a meeting in Portland, Maine, in December, 1844. They were seeking to cheer one another and steady their hearts after the crushing disappointment of just two months before. Different ones expressed their convictions. Then, to their astonishment, there rose up in their midst a frail young woman in her teens to declare that God had given to her a vision.

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This statement in itself was sufficient to astound them, and when they remembered the warnings that William Miller and others had given, they were not only astounded but filled with skeptical questioning. It is a matter of record that Miller, who had ever warned against fanatical people, had particularly warned against those who

might claim that they had received visions. Now here was this little Portland company confronted with someone in their circle who declared that she had had a vision. They had no occasion to challenge her personal life; it was blameless. But her prophetic claim in itself was enough to put them on their guard, if not to make them hopelessly skeptical. If ever a company of people had been conditioned to doubt prophetic claims, they were that company. We would stress this point; in fact, we are tempted to write it in large, bold capital letters.

[16] The young woman was Ellen Harmon, though she is known in Adventist circles as Ellen G. White, for in 1846 she married a Millerite minister, James White. She was not only frail in health, she was also shy and diffident in manner. She declared that what God had revealed to her was not simply for her own guidance but for the guidance of the company in Portland and like companies elsewhere. And so she began to travel to relate her Portland visions, and others she received. But everywhere she went the question arose: Is she what she claims to be, one to whom has truly been given the gift of the spirit of prophecy, or is she self-deluded, or perhaps worse, a designing fraud?

Testimony of Captain Bates

Among those who listened to her was a former sea captain, Joseph Bates. A few years earlier he had turned from the sea to become an active worker in the Millerite movement. In fact, he presided at one of the important general conferences of the movement. He was the only prominent Millerite leader who belonged to the small post-Millerite segment of which we are speaking. The fact that for years he had been a sea captain indicated that he belonged to a breed of men generally considered hard-bitten, skeptical, and well acquainted with many kinds and types of people.

In April, 1847, he published on one side of a single sheet of paper, known as a broadside, the text of one of Mrs. White's visions. (Later published in [Early Writings, 32-35.](#)) The text of the vision takes about three fourths of the space on the page. Following it are "Remarks" by Joseph Bates. We quote his "Remarks" as they appear on the broadside:

“It is now about two years since I first saw the author, and heard her relate the substance of her visions as she has since published them in Portland (April 6, 1846). Although I could see nothing in them that militated against the word, yet I felt alarmed and tried exceedingly, and for a long time unwilling to believe that it was any thing more than what was produced by a protracted debilitated state of her body.

“I therefore sought opportunities in presence of others, when her mind seemed freed from excitement, (out of meeting) to question, and cross question her, and her friends which accompanied her, especially her elder sister, to get if possible at the truth. During the number of visits she has made to New Bedford and Fairhaven since, while at our meetings, I have seen her in vision a number of times, and also in Topsham, Me., and those who were present during some of these exciting scenes know well with what interest and intensity I listened to every word, and watched every move to detect deception, or mesmeric influence. And I thank God for the opportunity I have had with others to witness these things. I can now confidently speak for myself. I believe the work is of God, and is given to comfort and strengthen his ‘scattered,’ ‘torn,’ and ‘pealed people,’ since the closing up of our work for the world in October, 1844. The distracted state of lo, heres! and lo, theres! since that time has exceedingly perplexed God’s honest, willing people, and made it exceedingly difficult for such as were not able to expound the many conflicting texts that have been presented to their view. I confess that I have received light and instruction on many passages that I could not before clearly distinguish. I believe her to be a self-sacrificing, honest, willing child of God, and saved, if at all, through her entire obedience to his will.”—Reprinted in [A Word to the Little Flock, 21, 1847](#). [17]

How revealing these remarks. They picture Bates, not as a credulous man, but as almost a doubting Thomas at the outset. However, after two years his mind was settled, and he concluded that she was what she claimed to be, a handmaiden of God to whom He gave inspired revelations. Bates’s remarks concerning her unique value and significance to the Advent people are also worth noting. He saw Mrs. White’s function as that of a guide, a counselor, an expounder of the Word of God, to lead the people of God forward on the right

[18] path, despite distracting “lo, heres! and lo, theres!” Says he: “I confess that I have received light and instruction on many passages that I could not before clearly distinguish.”

No Mass Movement Toward Mrs. White

Thus early there began to crystallize in the thinking of this post-Millerite, Sabbathkeeping company the firm conviction that God had graciously restored the gift of prophecy to His people. They saw in this the fulfillment of [Joel 2:28, 29](#). Furthermore, they saw this gift as given by God, not to teach a wide array of new, strange doctrines, not to lead to the discarding of the Bible for a new revelation, but rather to throw light upon the Holy Scriptures, and to counsel and direct the people of God in the midst of many deceptions that might lead them astray. In other words, Bates’s experience was increasingly duplicated by that of others. There was no mass movement toward accepting her, no feverish attempt on the part of a few leaders to promote and publicize her. That is evident from the record.

Turn to the early volumes of their church paper, the *Review and Herald*, the one authentic medium of expression of the Sabbathkeeping Adventist positions and beliefs in the opening decades of their history. There was no superabundance of articles by Mrs. White or about her in those early volumes, rather the contrary. James White, her husband, was the editor. Naturally, he might be expected to be her most loyal disciple, and thus her chief advocate and the eager publisher of her views. Actually he hesitated to do any promoting of her as a possessor of the prophetic gift. He felt that time must establish for each of the believers a conviction on so weighty and far-reaching a matter as the unique claims of Mrs. White. For several years, so far as Mrs. White was concerned, he published little more than a scriptural defense of the belief that the prophetic gift would be restored in the last days. His first major endeavor along this line is found in a pamphlet he published in 1847, entitled *A Word to the Little Flock*. He quoted [Joel 2:28-32](#), which is a prophecy that “in the last days” the gift of prophecy would be poured out. He reasoned from this that we should now expect to see the gift displayed. What gained acceptance for Mrs. White was the deep conviction, of which Bates’s testimony is a good exhibit, that took hold upon those who

saw her in vision and who listened to the counsels that she set before the church,

A Significant Bible Prophecy

In the next few years, as those Sabbathkeeping Adventists continued their study of the last book of the Bible, which prophetically describes events in the Christian Era, they found a passage that in symbolic language speaks of Satan's anger against God's church in the last days. The passage reads: "The dragon [Satan] was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" ([Revelation 12:17](#)). As they studied this text in relation to other prophetic passages they concluded that the prophet John was here speaking of God's faithful people, "the remnant," in earth's last days.

They noted that this remnant are described as they "which keep the commandments of God." They reasoned that this phrase obviously intended to identify, must truly identify or it would be pointless. In other words, if everyone in Christendom, simply because he claims to be a Christian, thereby qualifies as one who keeps the commandments of God, then the identification would be so vague as to be meaningless. They had quickly discovered, when they began to preach the seventh-day Sabbath from the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, that other Christian people tried to dispose of their argument by contending that the law had been abolished. This contention is still the favorite one. Certainly the person who declares that he does not have to keep the commandments could not qualify for membership in that unique prophetic company "which keep the commandments of God." This reasoning, combined with other evidence from related prophetic passages, led them to conclude that the prophet was here speaking of this newly born company of Sabbathkeeping Adventists. [20]

But they noted that [Revelation 12:17](#) also declares that this "remnant" "have the testimony of Jesus Christ," which "is the spirit of prophecy." (See [Revelation 19:10](#).) This reasoning naturally led them to feel that they were justified in finding, indeed that they should

expect to discover in their midst, someone possessed of the gift of “the spirit of prophecy.”

It is an interesting and significant fact that this prophetic passage was *not* in the thinking of these Sabbathkeeping Adventists when Mrs. White first declared that she had received a vision from God. Indeed, so far as we have been able to discover, this passage was not discussed in their literature for several years after that date. In other words, this passage in the book of Revelation did not condition either Bates or the others who heard Mrs. White relate her visions in those first years, to accept her claim. But later, when their study of Bible prophecy led them to [Revelation 12:17](#), they found there a confirmation of the conviction that had already taken hold upon them, that Mrs. White was what she claimed to be, a handmaiden of God to whom He had given the gift of the Spirit of prophecy.

A Frank Admission

[21] We freely admit that pseudo prophets, designing and otherwise, seem particularly to flourish when there is a religious awakening, or when a new religious movement is beginning. But we do not agree with those who would therefore summarily dispose of Mrs. White as simply one more such creature. The conclusion does not necessarily follow. Let us examine this point. A new movement does not immediately possess a well-organized church government or means of defining church membership. That is why it is easy for eccentric and designing persons to claim membership or even leadership in such a movement, hoping thereby to gain some hearing, perhaps even enjoy a transient prosperity. Yes, transient, for such persons almost certainly soon reveal themselves for what they are, and only an equally weird group of hearers would long continue to give ear to them. But the long years have only enhanced Mrs. White’s status among an ever-enlarging body of anything but fanatical people—Seventh-day Adventists. No, Mrs. White cannot be explained away as a crafty by-product of a religious awakening.

This evident fact has led some of Mrs. White’s critics to attempt to dispose of her by patronizingly declaring, not that she was a designing fraud, but simply that she was a neurotic, emotionally unstable creature, who had hallucinations. They have indulgently

freed her from the guilt of studied deception only by charging her with mental instability, irrationality, delusions.

Now, if she were an emotionally unstable neurotic, or psychotic, we should expect to see her easily swayed by dominant, and even fanatical, persons around her. Indeed, it is into the snare of fanaticism that most such false prophets fall ere long—particularly if weak-minded or emotionally unstable—thus destroying, sooner or later, the influence they might have over all except a small, hard core of blind followers.

But what does the record reveal? Was Mrs. White carried away with fanatical elements that tried to attach themselves to the early Sabbathkeeping Advent Movement? Is her record stained with incidents of idiotic, embarrassingly fanatical exercises? Did she write in those early days in endorsement and support of weird, erratic behavior? Certainly if she had, critics would long ago have loudly announced that fact, to our confusion. On the contrary, her writings from the very beginning speak clearly and vehemently against any and every variety of fanatical activity. The early record repeatedly tells of her standing before one or another Adventist company and exposing certain persons who tried to lead the Advent believers into fanatical excesses, and actually rescuing some who had fallen into such excesses.

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But let us not run ahead of our story. Mrs. White was soon to begin providing proof that she was illumined and guided in a manner uniquely beyond that of others. One of the earliest and most striking of these proofs presented itself within ten months of the time that she first made claim to having visions from God.

[23] **Chapter Three—Saved, From the Folly of Time
Setting**

The year is 1845. Ellen Harmon—soon to become Mrs. James White—had only begun traveling to various post-Millerite groups with her messages that she believed were from God. Nor had any sharply distinguishing lines developed as yet between the little segment who were soon to be most openly marked by their Sabbath-keeping and the remainder of the Millerites. Indeed, in 1845 this small segment had not yet freed themselves completely from the persuasive idea that a definite time might be set for the coming of Christ. As already stated, the majority of the Millerites eased the pain of their disappointment on October 22, 1844, by reasoning that they had simply made a slight error in calculation. As 1845 rolled on there were those who expressed the idea that an error of just one year had been made and therefore Christ would come in October, 1845—or to use the phrasing they borrowed from the Jewish reckoning of months, “the 7th month, 1845.”

[24] Now, time setting appeals to the imagination, and if the young woman, Ellen Harmon, is to be dismissed simply as someone with an overwrought imagination, or worse, we should expect to see her in the forefront of the campaign to prepare everyone for Christ’s advent in October, 1845. Actually, James White, whom she married in 1846, was looking hopefully toward this new date for the Advent. But *before* it arrived he changed his mind. Why? Let him speak for himself. Recounting, in 1847, certain experiences, he declared:

“It is well known that many were expecting the Lord to come at the 7th month, 1845. That Christ would then come we firmly believed. A few days before the time passed I was at Fairhaven, and Dartmouth, Mass., with a message on this point of time. At this time, Ellen [Harmon] was with the band at Carver, Mass., where she saw in vision, that we should be disappointed, and that the saints must pass through the ‘time of Jacob’s trouble,’ which was

future. Her view of Jacob's trouble was entirely new to us, as well as herself."—[A Word to the Little Flock, 22](#).

And so James White, who soon was to become a pillar in the slowly forming Seventh-day Adventist Church, turned his mind completely and forever from all time setting, to devote himself to the solemn work of preparing men for the day of God, which he ever after declared would be at a date known only to God.

A Pertinent Question

Strange, indeed, we repeat, that Ellen Harmon was not among the company who set their eyes on October, 1845. Why was she not carried away with the intriguing teaching, the dazzling feeling, that had taken hold of others round about her, if indeed she was an excitable person, easily influenced by current thinking, as some critics seek to explain her away? We leave them to answer this question. But that is not all. We have a related question for them. Why did she tell those who were awaiting the Advent that they would "be disappointed"? How did she know this? Those around her did not. The answer is plain—she had a vision. And the vision proved true! It was one of the first of a long series of visions that were to guide the Seventh-day Adventist Church and protect it from deception, fanaticism, and failure in the years ahead.

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A few years after her 1845 declaration, she again faced the question of time setting. And she faced it in the person of Joseph Bates, who evidently was not yet purged of the passion to set a date for the Advent. In 1850 he privately published a pamphlet in which he reckoned that Christ would come in October, 1851, just seven years after October 22, 1844, when He had entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary in heaven. He apparently presented this time-setting theory only in the one pamphlet, and largely confined his promotion of it to certain of the Sabbathkeeping Adventists in the State of Vermont. By the summer of 1851 the idea undoubtedly had begun to stimulate greatly the minds of those who believed it and to produce fervent preparation for the anticipated Advent. Remember, it was a staunch Advent pioneer who sponsored this idea.

Did Ellen White join with those making such preparation? Do we find in her writings anything to endorse the views set forth by

Joseph Bates? Now Bates, the only Millerite leader who belonged to the Sabbathkeeping group, might easily be expected to have had a strong influence on a frail young woman, if indeed her mind and spirit were as frail as her body. Let us look at the record. It reveals that she wrote no word in support of his theory. On the contrary, on June 21, 1851, Mrs. White had a vision on this matter of time setting, which led her to write:

[26] “Dear Brethren: The Lord has shown me that the message of the third angel must go, and be proclaimed to the scattered children of the Lord, and that it should not be hung on time; for time never will be a test again. I saw that some were getting a false excitement arising from preaching time; that the third angel’s message was stronger than time can be. I saw that this message can stand on its own foundation, and that it needs not time to strengthen it, and that it will go in mighty power, and do its work, and will be cut short in righteousness.

“I saw that some were making every thing bend to the time of this next fall—that is, making their calculations in reference to that time. I saw that this was wrong, for this reason: Instead of going to God daily to know their present duty, they look ahead, and make their calculations as though they knew the work would end this fall, without inquiring their duty of God daily.”—[The Review and Herald Extra, July 21, 1851](#).

Thus by the time the falsely set date for Christ’s return might be expected to be gaining serious consideration on the part of those who accepted it, Mrs. White spoke out clearly, emphatically, against this and all other attempts at date setting. Note her words: “Time never will be a test again.” With disapproval she added: “I saw that some were getting a false excitement arising from preaching time.” We can happily add that Bates, and apparently most of those who had accepted his time-setting views, dropped them quietly, quickly, and forever. Never again did time setting take possession of any segment of that company of Christians soon to be known as Seventh-day Adventists. In other words, no message from Mrs. White ever did more to protect us from the folly of time setting—a danger that ever lurks to entrap a certain type of prophetic student—than these unqualified words: “Time never will be a test again.”

We know not what Mrs. White may have said to her husband, James White, editor of the only paper we then had, the *Review and Herald*. But this we do know, nothing appeared in the *Review* in support of the idea that Christ would come in October, 1851. In fact, James White wrote in the *Review* on August 19 a series of reasons why he had *never* accepted this time-setting view. [27]

It is a part of the sad record of the first-day Adventist groups, following the breakup of the Millerite movement after the 1844 disappointment, that various of them kept setting dates for the Advent, with the recurring disappointment and disillusionment that inevitably followed. This probably best explains the depressing fact that most of these groups ultimately disintegrated and disappeared.

Now comes the question: Why did Mrs. White say so dogmatically that “time never will be a test again”? How did she in June, 1851, know that Christ would not come in October of that year? The Millerite movement, of which she had been a member, had set time—October 22, 1844. And this was followed by the time-setting hope of 1845, mentioned by James White, to say nothing of time setting by other remnants of Millerism. It bears repeating that by any human law of probability, we would expect her to have concurred with the general idea of time setting—yes, if she was having hallucinations, as some have charged, and not true visions, or if she was influenced by current thinking, as others have declared. But the record shows that the reverse was true. And it is this very record that provides us one of the initial reasons for believing her claim that her visions were from God. These reasons were to increase steadily with the years.

It is proper to add right here that God has not followed the plan of validating a prophet’s claims by speaking out from heaven in support of him, and thus suddenly and for all time settling the matter. God did that in behalf of only one, His own Son. The validation of the prophets has generally been slowly provided by their lives, their acts, and the nature of their messages. True, when God first sent Moses with a message to Israel in bondage, and Moses feared that the people would only ridicule his prophetic claim, the Lord did something special to aid him. God told him to take the staff in his hand and throw it down before the children of Israel and it would become a serpent, and then to lift it up again and it would become a [28]

staff. He assured Moses that this would cause the people to believe him. Here was something that men's eyes could see, and thus it served a purpose initially.

But as we look at Moses in the long perspective of the centuries, it never occurs to us to measure his prophetic claim by this experience of turning the staff into a serpent. We see him and his impressive deeds and messages in the context of the long years of his life and decide that the cumulative records warrants our believing that he spoke for God. In this we do right. We do not repudiate the incident of the staff made into a serpent; we simply consider it inconsequential by comparison with the other more weighty evidence. Indeed, if no other proof for his claim had developed in his long years of service and preaching, we might well be tempted to doubt that the incident of the serpent gave valid proof of his prophetic status.

Now, when Mrs. White first began to have visions, which often were given to her in public, sometimes singular events occurred in relation to them that greatly impressed those who looked on. For example, there was the incident when she held at arm's length, for approximately half an hour, a Bible weighing eighteen and a half pounds, a feat quite impossible of explanation by any ordinary laws of physical strength. Even a strong man could not begin to match this. And Mrs. White was frail. This incident, along with others, undoubtedly played a part at the outset, and rightly so, in the plans of God. Men need some aids to their faith at the beginning of the way—at least the great majority do—in order to believe someone's [29] breathtaking claim that he has received visions from God. Joseph Bates, and a few like him, came to their conclusions a little differently, as we have already noted in his testimony.

We have the advantage today of being able to look back over a century of time—a great advantage indeed—as we seek to evaluate her claims. We have already noted a few important incidents and attitudes on fanaticism and time setting. But much more remains to be presented.

Chapter Four—Streams of Light Around the World [30]

Let us look, now, at an array of evidences of early, far-visioned planning and counseling by Mrs. White that increasingly caused her to stand out alone amid a poverty-stricken little company. That post-Millerite group gave pitiful evidence of a lack of any over-all plan, or of any means for carrying out such a plan if they had had it. We, today, witness a highly integrated, efficient, sacrificially financed Advent Movement, the plans and objectives of which are well-defined and vigorously pursued. But we must remember that this was not always so. There *was* a day of small things, of feeble, faltering beginnings, yes, of gropings in the dark by a little company, whose ideas and plans matched as poorly as the patches on their clothes. Indeed, there seemed to be often as many different ideas as there were persons in the small meetings held in the early years. The record is clear on this.

Turn back with us to November, 1848, and join the handful of Sabbathkeeping Adventists at a meeting held in the house of Otis Nichols in Dorchester, Massachusetts. James White was there, and so was Joseph Bates. Mrs. White was taken off in vision. When she came out of vision she said to her husband:

“I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world’.”—Ellen G. White, [Life Sketches of Ellen G. White](#), 125. [31]

A Hard Question [32]

But what would they use for money to pay the printer, to say nothing of the problem of gathering articles and circulating the paper? The record states that James White pondered this question till the summer of 1849. Then the impression took hold of him

that indeed he should write and publish a little paper. But almost immediately he became troubled with “doubt and perplexity, as he was penniless.” So, lacking in faith, he decided to go out again and find a job with his scythe, mowing a grain field. Here is the story of what happened then, as recorded by Mrs. White:

“As he left the house, a burden was rolled upon me, and I fainted. Prayer was offered for me, and I was blessed, and taken off in vision. I saw that the Lord had blessed and strengthened my husband to labor in the field one year before; that he had made a right disposition of the means he there earned; and that he would have a hundredfold in this life, and, if faithful, a rich reward in the kingdom of God; but that the Lord would not now give him strength to labor in the field, for He had another work for him to do, and that if he ventured into the field, he would be cut down by sickness; but that he must write, write, write, and walk out by faith. He immediately began to write, and when he came to some difficult passage, we would unite in prayer to God for an understanding of the true meaning of His word.”—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 125, 126.](#)

First Journal Published

James White began publishing a little eight-page paper, [The Present Truth, July, 1849](#). Additional issues came out more or less regularly for a year, after which the paper was transformed into the *Review and Herald*, which became the official organ of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The first issue of *Present Truth* was only 1,000 copies, an unimpressive printing compared with the mighty river of literature coming out from Seventh-day Adventist presses over the world today! The significant fact about this 1849 printing was not the size of it, but that it was the beginning of a great publishing work.

There is a second impressive fact. This publishing work, which was to grow so steadily and impressively, was launched *before* the Sabbathkeeping company of Adventists had even taken definite form. But the third and most significant fact of all is this: The appeal to James White to publish at so early and unpropitious an hour in Adventist history did not come from some far-visioned man in the movement. It came from a young woman, not quite twenty-one years

of age, who declared that God told her in vision that the Advent people must begin to publish, that if by faith they would go forward, ultimately the endeavor would “be like streams of light that went clear round the world.”

It would be difficult to imagine the Seventh-day Adventist Church today without a far-flung publishing work. Those who look in on us always comment on this phase of our work and readily grant that it is one of the prime secrets of our evangelizing strength. But what most of them do not know—at least they routinely fail to mention it—is that our publishing work finds its origin in a vision given to Mrs. White.

Yet Mrs. White had had only a few grades of formal education— a nearly mortal injury received when she was nine had virtually ended her school days. Why would a young woman with so little education be so insistent on the importance of beginning a publishing work?

[33]

Why should she feel dogmatically certain that such a work, though beginning small, would someday become world-encircling? Did she not know that endless papers had been started through the years by numerous organizations, only to languish and die a few years later, without having created any stir in America, much less the world? One needs only to examine the records in historical society offices to find eloquent and doleful proof of this. Why should she so soon—this vision was in 1848—risk exposing to ridicule her claim to having received visions from God, by making this most improbable prediction about the potential growth of the Adventist publishing work? Again, why did she call upon her own husband to subject himself to the rigors of the forlorn-looking publishing project? Why not single out someone else to take the embarrassing risk of failure and then be able to blame him rather than her husband for that failure? She risked sinking both her own and her husband’s good name ere the budding movement had really gotten under way.

Only One Answer

These and similar pertinent questions clamor for answers. For all of them there is patently but *one* answer: Mrs. White was firmly convinced that her visions came from God. And then follows in-

evitably the further conclusion: The fact that the amazing success of this publishing work, in which no astute businessman would have invested a dollar at the outset, only supports Mrs. White's repeated declarations that her visions did, indeed, come from God.

[34] If only we could put ourselves in the historical mood, transporting ourselves to 1849, we could more fully appreciate how impossible, yes fantastic, her words must then have seemed. There is only one explanation why the publishing work actually did get under way in that year, and that is because James White obeyed what he believed was a vision from God. That statement is undebatable. Now as we look back we can say without hesitancy that our Seventh-day Adventist publishing work, so early launched, proved to be from its very beginning one of the greatest sources of our strength and our growth. It has, indeed, provided a striking, worldwide proof of the inspired character of the message Mrs. White declared God gave her in vision.

Chapter Five—Saved From the Danger of Disintegration

[35]

We earlier remarked that the Sabbathkeeping Adventist group that began to take shape in the late 1840's and early 1850's had little cohesion or coordination. There was no church government, there were no conferences. There was not even a church name! This situation was almost inevitable. That has been the history of the beginnings of almost all religious bodies. Let us never forget that the Millerite movement, out of the soil of which Seventh-day Adventism sprang, was a loose-knit aggregation of people who, without withdrawing from membership in their particular churches, accepted the stirring preaching of Christ's coming. They were more or less united in spirit as they attended the great meetings held by Miller and his associates. This was the extent of the unity of that movement.

Now the Millerites had unhappy memories of their relationship to this or that particular church body. They remembered that when the movement had gained great momentum by early 1844, many of them had been disfellowshipped from their churches for accepting the doctrine of Christ's personal soon coming. Ellen Harmon, for example, was disfellowshipped, along with her father and mother. It was in the summer of 1844 that Millerite ministers, in turn, raised their voices not only to proclaim the advent of Christ as near but to call on those who believed this to come out of the churches, because, said they, those churches had become Babylon. They based this charge on [Revelation 14:8; 18:1-4](#). It is thus easy to see how these disfellowshipped and spiritually homeless people in the years following 1844 might easily be suspicious of the very idea of church organizations, with their well-defined names and rigid creeds. In fact, it was the very rigidity of the different church bodies that had caused them to disfellowship those who had accepted the Bible teaching of the visible appearing of our Lord.

[36]

Now, it was such spiritually homeless people that largely constituted the initial group of the newly forming Sabbathkeeping Advent Movement. That explains why this new movement began, not simply with a lack of organization but with a fear of it. To transform this loosely knit movement into a church was to many of them equivalent to returning to Babylon. So strong was this fear, this antipathy to formal church order and organization and doctrine, that some were averse to the idea of even attempting to vote a formal name for the new movement. As we look back through the yellowed pages of the *Review and Herald* of the 1850's, we find this fear expressed by most of the Adventist clergy and laity.

Life of Church Threatened

[37] This lack of church organization up to the 1860's brought with it perplexing problems grave enough to endanger the very life of this newly forming religious body. The record of those earliest years discloses that in the absence of organization it was difficult to protect against the forces of disintegration. Human nature being what it is, it was easy for men with strongly divergent views of how church life should be conducted, to seek to carry out their variant views. The result was friction that threatened to split apart different companies. Furthermore, in the absence of any well-defined statement of belief, or of agreed-upon credentials for Adventist ministers, how could the different companies hope to protect themselves against erratic and often pious-appearing frauds who might seek to prey upon them? One cannot read the record up to the 1860's without wondering how this Sabbathkeeping segment of Adventists ever escaped the sorry fate that came upon most of the fragments of the Millerite movement, the fate of disintegration, dissolution, oblivion.

In the midst of all this we see James and Ellen White traveling about from company to company. They found that nearly everyone feared organization as they feared Babylon itself. The mystery is, how did Mrs. White herself escape being swallowed up by this discord and sometimes inevitable confusion, if she were but an unstable individual, who simply reflected the viewpoint of those around her?

The record in the *Review and Herald* bears eloquent testimony to the fact that the most distinguishing thing about Mrs. White in those difficult days was that she *differed* with most of those round about her on the key question of church order and organization. Indeed, her anguish of spirit, of which she often spoke, grew partly out of the fact that she was in conflict with the current thinking. She took issue with it right and left as she stood before one company and then another and rebuked those whose views, and sometimes even their conduct, were alien to good church order. We hear her speaking forth in 1853 these key words—words that were to be followed by many like them: “The Lord has shown that gospel order has been too much feared and neglected. Formality should be shunned; but, in so doing, order should not be neglected.” These are the opening lines of a message she published in a little pamphlet, now a part of *Early Writings*. The message begins on page 97 of that book. [38]

In 1860 we adopted the name Seventh-day Adventists. In 1861 sufficient support was secured for the idea of organization to organize churches and then to create our first conference, the Michigan Conference. In 1863 there was created the General Conference organization, which now coordinates all Seventh-day Adventist activities round the world.

Looking Back on a Great Event

In a letter written from Australia to the 1893 General Conference session, Mrs. White recounted the history of church order and organization of the Adventist Church. We quote a few paragraphs:

“I was one of the number who had an experience in establishing it [gospel order] from the first. I know the difficulties that had to be met, the evils which it was designed to correct, and I have watched its influence in connection with the growth of the cause. At an early stage in the work, God gave us special light upon this point, and this light, together with the lessons that experience has taught us, should be carefully considered.

“From the first our work was aggressive. Our numbers were few, and mostly from the poorer class. Our views were almost unknown to the world. We had no houses of worship, but few publications, and very limited facilities for carrying forward our work. The sheep

were scattered in the highways and byways, in cities, in towns, in forests. The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus was our message....

[39] “Our numbers gradually increased. The seed that was sown was watered of God, and He gave the increase. At first we assembled for worship, and presented the truth to those who would come to hear, in private houses, in large kitchens, in barns, in groves, and in schoolhouses; but it was not long before we were able to build humble houses of worship.

“As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in new fields, for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable.

“Yet there was strong feeling against it among our people. The first-day Adventists were opposed to organization, and most of the Seventh-day Adventists entertained the same ideas. We sought the Lord with earnest prayer that we might understand His will, and light was given by His Spirit that there must be order and thorough discipline in the church—that organization was essential. System and order are manifest in all the works of God throughout the universe. Order is the law of heaven, and it should be the law of God’s people on the earth.

“We had a hard struggle in establishing organization. Notwithstanding that the Lord gave testimony after testimony upon this point, the opposition was strong, and it had to be met again and again. But we knew that the Lord God of Israel was leading us, and guiding by His providence. We engaged in the work of organization, and marked prosperity attended this advance movement.”—*Daily Bulletin of the General Conference*, Jan. 29, 30, 1893, pp. 22, 24. Republished in [Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 24-27](#).

[40] Yes, there was “a hard struggle in establishing organization.” But it was Mrs. White’s voice, sounding out clearly and emphatically over the years, that contributed greatly to the creation of this much-needed organization. Without such organization the Advent Move-

ment most certainly would ultimately have broken into a strange array of discordant pieces.

A Reasonable Conclusion

Now a mentally disturbed or neurotic person—as critics most commonly like to explain away Mrs. White—is not the kind of person deeply concerned with so matter-of-fact a thing as organization. We believe it wholly reasonable to see in her forthright advocacy of church order a further strong reason to believe that her counsels were inspired of God. Or to state the case most conservatively: Her advocacy of organization should forever make senseless the easy charge that she was simply a poor self-deluded neurotic. More than that, this advocacy throws grave suspicion on the charge that she was a designing woman who artfully sought to advance her selfish ends. Such persons generally thrive in a world of disorder, not a world where responsible leaders keep a steady hand on everything. It may be added right here that James White declined the presidency, though it was urged on him when organization was effected. No dark scheme here by the Whites to take over and control.

Now, Mrs. White's appeal for organization—before there was any tide in that direction—provides good evidence against the easy explanations that critics offer for her unique counsels through the years. Hence may we not reasonably accept her explanation that God gave her inspired guidance for the church? How quick would present-day critics denounce her as a fraud if her counsels in those formative 1850's had been *against* organization!

Chapter Six—Visions on Healthful Living

Perhaps on no subject has Mrs. White written more than on the subject of healthful living. If we are to appreciate the singular force of those writings we need to carry ourselves back to the mid-nineteenth century to look at how men lived, how they ate, and how they sought to cure themselves of various maladies. In the mid-1850's the American diet was appallingly far from healthful. With this statement any present-day public health worker or authority in nutrition would agree. Overeating, even gluttony, was common, and so was drunkenness. The record of those times is a witness to the great durability of the stomachs of our forebears. Their digestive tracts must have been made of iron. Indeed, their very constitutions must have been made of something like unto iron. How else would they ever have survived the drugs they swallowed to "cure" them of their illnesses?

The common medicines then employed, though sometimes bearing an innocent-sounding name like calomel, often had as their active ingredients such lethal substances as opium, strychnine, and mercury. A writer of those times, with some realization of the dangers of the popular medicines, ironically remarked that "Saul has slain his thousands, but calomel its tens of thousands." Tight-fitting dresses enveloped and constricted women. Corsets were drawn so tight that they gave a wasplike appearance to the body and made breathing difficult. Long, trailing skirts gathered up the dust of the street, thus adding to the folly of women's dress.

Reformers Arise

So great, indeed, was the folly of it all—in diet, in medicine, and in dress—that reformers here and there were beginning to speak out against it, each one with his own distinctive idea, some focusing on reform in dress, some on medical care, some on diet. It was in those days that hydrotherapy (water) treatments began to be used

in somewhat organized fashion by certain who rebelled against the dreadful methods of drugging that were killing rather than curing people.

Various ideas of reform in diet were abroad. And what variant ideas they were! For example, there was Graham, who gave his name to graham bread. Some, for example, thought that no salt should be used in the diet—they declared it to be poison. That was certainly a tasteless approach to better diet.

Who was right and who was wrong in all the divergent thinking? Indeed, were any of them right in opposing accepted medical practices, and current dietary habits? Here was a question difficult, if not impossible, to answer. In this kind of world the Advent Movement began, its own leadership suffering physical affliction in marked degree, with James White among those who thus suffered.

With these disturbing questions before us we come to a farmhouse, the home of Aaron Hilliard in Otsego, Michigan. It was Friday, June 5, 1863. James and Ellen White, with others, were kneeling in a circle of prayer, for the opening of the Sabbath. She was praying, and very particularly for her husband's health, when she was taken off in vision. After she came out of vision she declared that there had been revealed to her certain principles of healthful living. This was followed by a vision on December 25, 1865, at Rochester, New York, which gave additional light on the whole matter of health. This vision also revealed that Adventists should have a health institution of their own in which to give practical expression to these right health principles. Out of these two visions came the primary, distinctive health teachings that have marked the Advent Movement from that day to this. Out of these visions came our chain of sanitariums, the first of which was opened at Battle Creek on September 5, 1866.

[43]

Now if Mrs. White were only an emotionally unstable, simple sort of woman, rather easily moved by anything strange or unusual, we would expect her to have incorporated in her narration of her visions endless oddities in the matter of diet and of medical care, for many oddities were being set forth by different reformers. Furthermore, seeing she had only about three grades of formal education, and, as some have charged, she reflected only the *dominant* thinking of her day, we might expect her visions to endorse the accepted

methods of healing, for did they not express the dominant view of the day, the view of the learned medical profession?

A Distinctive Position

[44] The facts reveal that in these two extended visions, and in others later on the subject of healthful living, Mrs. White certainly did not stand in awe of accepted medical practices. On the other hand, she did not take up indiscriminately with all the new ideas on treatment or on diet—far from it. True, her views were in harmony with some of the new ideas. On the law of averages some of these ideas would be right. The simple record is that she made her way through an uncharted wilderness of divergent views, sometimes accepting, sometimes rejecting, and ever and anon setting forth a view that none had endorsed.

Her over-all presentation of health was strangely different from that either of the orthodox doctors or of the unorthodox medical or nonmedical healers, who often accompanied their healing program in their institutions with dancing, entertainments, and the like. She squarely built her whole presentation of healthful living on a scriptural basis—that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, that it is a spiritual duty to care for these bodies, which, if we keep them in good health, will enable us better to live for God. She stressed four aspects of healthful living:

1. Diet. She declared that diet was of vast importance to good health. Remember, that was in a day when doctors gave little, if any, attention to diet in relation to health or to recovery from disease.

2. Natural aids to health, such as hydrotherapy (water) treatments, fresh air, sunlight, rest, proper exercise, and the like. She affirmed that these were of prime value. But she wrote at a time when medical men rarely thought about these as therapeutic agents. Mrs. White's emphasis on natural aids to health was accompanied by an indictment of the drugs then being used. If a doctor today used such drugs he would almost certainly forfeit his medical license.

3. Mental health. She insisted that the health of the mind has a tremendous effect upon the health of the body, and vice versa. Was much attention being given to this matter in the mid-nineteenth century? No.

4. Preventive medicine. She declared that a proper regimen of living could do much to ward off various diseases. Indeed, one of the reasons she set forth for the creation of our sanitariums was that they might teach people not only how to get well but how to prevent illness, that is, how to *keep* well. [45]

Her Selection No Accident

Now, as we look back on this, what Mrs. White wrote assumes large significance. That prompts the key question: Did this woman, with virtually no education, just *happen* to emphasize four aspects of healthful living that in her day were at best given minor status, but now stand in the very forefront? Certainly today diet has major emphasis in the whole program of health. Physical medicine, which deals with hydrotherapy, eletrotherapy, exercise, rest, and other related matters, now has a most respectable and significant standing. Mental health, the relation of body to mind, is really only today beginning to come into its own, as is indicated by a relatively new term used in the medical world—psychosomatic medicine. This describes that branch of medicine primarily concerned with the interaction of mind and body as they affect health. Mrs. White long ago declared that a large per cent of physical maladies reflect troubles in the mind. Modern medicine agrees with this. And preventive medicine? Great emphasis is given to this today by a whole array of medical men.

[46]

Chapter Seven—Visions on Healthful Living-Continued

So much for a general statement of Mrs. White's relation to the subject of health. And even a general statement is impressive. We think it becomes more so as we focus on certain specific declarations that she made through the long years. Let us look at a few of these.

She had hardly begun writing on the theme of health when she declared that one's diet would be much better if it was free from "grease of all kinds" ([Testimonies for the Church 2:45](#)). That was in 1868. The years that followed saw her making similar statements. But did medical literature in the 1860's or for many decades afterwards point a condemnatory finger at grease or greasy foods? No. Why should they? They had no scientific evidence to warrant their believing that grease or greasy foods might prove damaging to health. And did not grease give an added quality and tang to many foods? Indeed, it is only in the very recent past that the evidence has begun to pour in that fats, and very particularly animal fats, are at least in part the cause of certain heart and blood-vessel diseases, particularly coronary heart attack. Now when Mrs. White, in 1868, spoke against "grease" her readers would naturally understand that she was speaking against animal fats. This early statement was to be followed increasingly over the years with appeals to refrain, whenever possible, from all flesh foods.

[47]

As was true of some of the Bible writers, she spoke out without having detailed knowledge herself of just why she thus spoke. God does not always see fit to reveal to His inspired writers all the reasons why He calls upon them to speak for or against something. Mrs. White did not live to see the day of the confirmation of what she wrote on fats, but we see it; and that confirmation ought to have some bearing on the conclusion we reach as to whether Mrs. White was inspired.

The Poor “Grass Eaters”

A century ago, when she began to write against grease of all kinds, she also began to write against “flesh meats.” Sometimes the two are indicted in the same sentence (see [Testimonies for the Church 2:45](#)). But at that time both doctors and laymen here in America and other countries where meat was readily available seemed to feel that a person simply could not have a good diet without meat. It was thought that to abstain from it would make one anemic, pale, weak. Loud were the declarations of brawny, hard-working men that “meat and potatoes” were the real staples of life. Seventh-day Adventists who, guided by Mrs. White’s counsel, largely turned from meat, came to be known by many as “grass eaters.” But the years have rolled by with time and research relentlessly moving on to the devastation of delightful phrases and the undermining of long-cherished dietary ideas. Our very modern time has opened up the wide field of the importance of vitamins and minerals, to say nothing of other areas of research. The result is that today nutritionists inform us that green-leafed vegetables are indispensable to a good diet. But research has gone further and now informs us that one can have a diet ideal for optimum health without eating *any* meat. And so the delightful phrase “grass eaters” had to be buried, gently wrapped in a shroud of lettuce leaves. [48]

Speaking of colorful names, there was another one—note the past tense—that was often applied to Seventh-day Adventists, that is, “bran eaters.” This was a further instance where Adventists acquired a name because of giving attention to Mrs. White and her counsels. Back in 1868 she began to write in favor of whole-wheat bread. At that time she said: “Fine-flour bread cannot impart to the system the nourishment that you will find in the unbolted wheat bread. The common use of bolted wheat bread cannot keep the system in a healthy condition.”—[Testimonies for the Church 2:68](#). In other words, Mrs. White was speaking out against removing the bran from the flour. She declared there was a certain nutritional value in it. We believed her and proceeded accordingly. And for our pains we came to be known by many as “bran eaters.” Full confirmation of her position in regard to whole-wheat flour did not really come until about 1940, when research that had largely been kept within the con-

[49] fines of laboratories began to break out over the land. Said scientists, there are vital minerals in the bran, indispensable minerals. And so as America made ready for World War II, one of the steps taken was to reintroduce into white flour certain of the important minerals of which it had been robbed by the removal of the bran. Thus today we have “enriched flour.” Not many years after this a large delegation of Adventist leaders gathered for a general meeting in the city of Battle Creek, which had formerly been the denomination’s headquarters. Commenting on the convention, a newspaper columnist in the city remarked that they had some interesting people in their midst this week who formerly were called “grass eaters” and “bran eaters” by those who today are solicitous that their grandchildren have whole-wheat mush for breakfast and spinach for dinner. In a sense, through eating enriched flour, men everywhere today are becoming bran eaters. We welcome them to our circle.

When Mrs. White first began to write on the subject of health in the 1860’s the common notion was that “night air” was bad. What did people really mean by that? We do not profess to know. It sounds a little ludicrous. But they firmly believed it and accordingly closed their windows. Mrs. White rose up and declared that windows should be thrown open, that fresh air was vital to good health. Men and women shivered at the very idea of it even more than they did at the cool air that might come through the open window. It is hard to understand that attitude now, but if we could transport ourselves back to the 1860’s we would shiver along with the occupants of the homes as they read Mrs. White’s appeal to open the windows. See her article, “Disease and Its Causes” in *How to Live*, No. 3 (1865).² We need hardly add that the age of “bad night air” has ended. We live in a day when fresh air is considered indispensable to good health—fresh air both night and day.

Value of Physical Exercise

In 1867 Mrs. White wrote critically of those doctors who frowned on physical exercise for the sick. It seems that at that time it was felt by many that an invalid might endanger recovery if he set out on any program of physical exercise or labor. Said

²This material is currently found in [Selected Messages 2:441-454](#).

Mrs. White at that time: “For years I have from time to time been shown that the sick should be taught that it is wrong to suspend all physical labor in order to regain health. In thus doing the will becomes dormant, the blood moves sluggishly through the system.” —[Testimonies for the Church 1:555](#). Then she added immediately: [50] “Well-regulated labor gives the invalid the idea that he is not totally useless in the world, that he is, at least, of some benefit.”

Many of our readers can recall the earlier days when a patient in the hospital, particularly one recovering from surgery, was made to lie still in bed, sometimes for weeks. Indeed, sick people in general were slow to engage in physical activity as they recovered, unless, of course, grim economic necessity demanded it.

But how different now. Most large hospitals have a department called occupational therapy, in which patients engage in manual activities, limited, it is true, but nevertheless manual labor. It is considered good medicine. Again, surgical patients are now generally made to walk a few feet within a day or two after surgery, even heavy surgery. Such activity is considered vital to satisfactory recovery.

Comments on Cancer

So far as we have been able to discover, Mrs. White’s first references to cancer were in the early 1860’s. To be precise, in 1864 she declared that cancer was transmissible, which clearly implied that it was germ-borne (see *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 4, page 146). In 1905 she spoke specifically of “cancerous germs” ([The Ministry of Healing, 313](#)).

Now, in 1905, much less 1864, did any learned doctor think that cancer was a germ-borne disease? Emphatically No. Quite a while after 1905 some researchers began to advocate what was known as the germ theory in regard to cancer, but they received a rather stony stare from almost all their colleagues. Finally, a whole new world of research opened up in the field of viruses. A virus might be described in nontechnical language as an infinitely small germ; at least no better description can currently be offered, [51] for as yet we really know little about viruses. They are beyond the range of all except the electronic microscope. But this much we do know now, that these “midget germs,” to borrow Virologist

Stanley's phrase, seem most certainly to be the cause of a variety of afflictions. An editorial published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 1, 1956, declared:

“During the past decade the concept of viral etiology [virus cause] of cancer and allied diseases has gained considerable momentum.... It is entirely possible that most, if not all, malignant tumors, not only in animals but also in humans, are caused by filterable viruses. Many of these viruses may be transmitted from generation to generation, remaining in a latent form harmless for their carrier hosts. Now and then, however, prompted by some obscure activating factors (some of them physiological, such as metabolic or hormonal, others extrinsic, such as chemical poisons or ionizing radiation), these hitherto dormant viruses may change into tumor-producing pathogens.”

Yet not so many years ago—decades after Mrs. White's explicit statement in 1905—of the few things that scientists were sure they “knew” about cancer, one of them was this, that it was *not* germ-borne.

Tobacco is a Poison

Early in her public life Mrs. White began to speak against tobacco. In 1864 she wrote: “Tobacco is a poison of the most deceitful and malignant kind, having an exciting, then a paralyzing influence upon the nerves of the body. It is all the more dangerous because its effects upon the system are so slow, and at first scarcely perceivable.”—[Spiritual Gifts 4a:128](#).

[52] Or take another, and much later statement, typical of the constant pattern of her concern regarding the dangers of tobacco. In 1905 she wrote:

“Tobacco is a slow, insidious, but most malignant poison. In whatever form it is used, it tells upon the constitution; it is all the more dangerous because its effects are slow and at first hardly perceptible.”—[The Ministry of Healing, 327, 328](#).

Who, in 1905, much less 1864, among learned scientific men would have described the dangers of tobacco in such startling language? Who was using the terms “insidious,” “malignant”? Who

was saying that tobacco's "effects upon the system are so slow, and at first scarcely perceivable"?

True, research in recent years indicates that cigarette smoking is much more likely to produce cancer of the lungs than pipe smoking, for example. But the difference seems to be in degree, not in kind; that is, in terms of the amount of tobacco actually inhaled. Besides, cancer of the lungs is only one of three grave dangers from tobacco smoking. There are maladies of the heart and blood vessels, which investigation has disclosed are much more frequent in smokers. Then there is emphysema, a malady that affects the air sacs in the lungs, and ultimately produces death. This malady is receiving increasing attention by medical men, who are alarmed by the ever-rising total of its victims.

Why did Mrs. White feel prepared to speak so forth-rightly and specifically about tobacco before medical men saw grave dangers in it? We leave the reader to answer.

We spoke, a little earlier, of the variant ideas abroad in mid-nineteenth century regarding salt, and that some reformers emphatically declared it was a poison. What if she had concurred? In 1884 she said: "Do not eat largely of salt."—[The Review and Herald, July 29, 1884](#). See also [The Ministry of Healing, 305](#) (1905). In 1901, [Letter 37](#), she enlarged on the matter, thus: "I use some salt, and always have, because from the light given me by God, this article, in the place of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood. The whys and wherefores of this I know not, but I give you the instruction as it is given me."—Quoted in [Counsels on Diet and Foods, 344](#) (1938).

[53]

Nothing could better describe the present-day medical appraisal of salt, which is so vital to the body, but which should be sparingly used.

And so we might go on describing various matters in the realm of health on which Mrs. White spoke out clearly at a time when the whole scientific world about her gave no support to her statements. In fact, in some instances, they considered them unworthy of any consideration. We invite some mathematician skilled in the operation of the law of probability to tell us what chance there was—one in a thousand or one in a million, whatever it might be—that Mrs. White by sheer accident or guesswork could have made the right

statement in this and that and the other area of health when there was no current evidence to aid her in that guess. Is it not more reasonable and credible to explain her remarkable statements in terms of her own explanation, that God gave to her revelations?

Chapter Eight—Eminent Testimony on Mrs. White’s Health Teachings

[54]

The name of Dr. J. H. Kellogg, who began his medical practice in 1876 and who long was the medical head of the great Battle Creek Sanitarium, was known not only to Seventh-day Adventists but to a wide host of outstanding people over the world. In his last years he broke with the Adventist Church and turned against Mrs. White. He even endeavored—incredible as it sounds—to make it appear that the Battle Creek Sanitarium had never had any relationship to the church! But he forgot some things that he had written years before, statements that bear a striking witness to the unique position Mrs. White holds in the matter of health. We quote here a statement he wrote in 1890 that constituted the preface to the book *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, the first part of which book was authored by Mrs. White. Said Dr. Kellogg:

“Nearly thirty years ago there appeared in print the first of a series of remarkable and important articles on the subject of health, by Mrs. E. G. White. These articles at once commanded earnest consideration by those who were acquainted with Mrs. White’s previous writings and labors. Thousands were led to change life-long habits, and to renounce practices thoroughly fixed by heredity as well as by long indulgence. So great a revolution could not be wrought in a body of people without the aid of some powerful incentive, which in this case was undoubtedly the belief that the writings referred to not only bore the stamp of truth, but were indorsed as such by a higher than human authority. This is not the proper place for the consideration of the grounds upon which this belief was based, but the reader’s attention is invited to a few facts of interest in this connection:—

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“1. At the time the writings referred to first appeared, the subject of health was almost wholly ignored, not only by the people to whom they were addressed, but by the world at large.

“2. The few advocating the necessity of a reform in physical habits, propagated in connection with the advocacy of genuine reformatory principles the most patent and in some instances disgusting errors.

“3. Nowhere, and by no one, was there presented a systematic and harmonious body of hygienic truths, free from patent errors, and consistent with the Bible and the principles of the Christian religion.

“Under these circumstances, the writings referred to make their appearance. The principles taught were not enforced by scientific authority, but were presented in a simple, straightforward manner by one who makes no pretense to scientific knowledge, but claims to write by the aid and authority of the divine enlightenment.

[56] “How have the principles presented under such peculiar circumstances and with such remarkable claims stood the test of time and experience? is a question which may very properly be asked. Its answer is to be found in facts which are capable of the amplest verification. The principles presented have been put to the test of practical experience by thousands; and whenever intelligently and consistently carried out, the result has been found in the highest degree satisfactory. Thousands have testified to physical, mental, and moral benefits received. Many of the principles taught have come to be so generally adopted and practiced that they are no longer recognized as reforms, and may, in fact, be regarded as prevalent customs among the more intelligent classes. The principles which a quarter of a century ago were either entirely ignored or made the butt of ridicule, have quietly won their way into public confidence and esteem, until the world has quite forgotten that they have not always been thus accepted. New discoveries in science and new interpretations of old facts have continually added confirmatory evidence, until at the present time every one of the principles advocated more than a quarter of a century ago is fortified in the strongest possible manner by scientific evidence.”—Pages iii, iv.

Following this long statement, every sentence of which is significant as evidence, Dr. Kellogg makes a most important general observation regarding Mrs. White:

“The guidance of infinite wisdom is as much needed in discerning between truth and error as in the evolution of new truths. Novelty is by no means a distinguishing characteristic of true principles, and

the principle holds good as regards the truths of hygienic reform, as well as those of other reformatory movements. The greatest and most important reformatory movements of modern times have not been those which presented new facts and principles, but those which revived truths and principles long forgotten, and which have led the way back to the paths trodden by men of by-gone ages, before the world had wandered so far away from physical and moral rectitude.”—Page iv.

Well said. Would that Dr. Kellogg had always kept in mind what he wrote about Mrs. White in the days when he knew her so well.

A University Professor Speaks

[57]

There was published in the *Review and Herald* early in 1959 a series of articles from the pen of Dr. Clive M. McCay, then professor of nutrition at Cornell University. The series dealt with Mrs. White's health teachings, particularly in the field of nutrition. It seems that Dr. McCay had read a book by Mrs. White on health reform, particularly on diet. He was so impressed that he secured other books by her. This caused him to give a lecture on Mrs. White as a remarkable woman of the nineteenth century. We read a copy of this talk and went to visit him to invite him to write something for the *Review*.

We still vividly recall the visit we made to his home at Ithaca, New York. He graciously invited us to stay overnight. An authority in the field of nutrition, author of many books, and an avid reader of many more, he proved to be a most stimulating conversationalist. Naturally the conversation kept turning to Mrs. White. We still remember the question he asked us two or three different times during the evening: “How did Mrs. White, with virtually no education, set forth health teachings so far in advance of her times?” We replied that there were those who explained it by saying that she simply picked up her ideas from various people of those earlier days. He laughed. He wanted to know how she could possibly have had the rare judgment and discernment to know which ideas to select and which to discard. He spoke with certainty, for he conducted a course at the university in the history of nutrition. He explained that a great majority of the ideas promoted in mid-nineteenth century were

quite irrational and have now been repudiated. Then he added, in amazement, that the views she set forth are ones that have received increasing endorsement by the scientific world.

[58] We tried to explain to him that the Adventist Church holds that Mrs. White was inspired and thus received special light and direction from Heaven, both as to what was good and bad among current views, and what new instruction was needed for good health. Naturally it was difficult for him to understand the word “inspiration” in the sense in which the conservative Christian world through the centuries has understood it. But he was sure of this, that Mrs. White must have been a most remarkable woman.

Summary by Dr. McCay

We can do no better than to quote the closing paragraphs of his three-article series on Mrs. White that appeared in the *Review and Herald*:

“To sum up the discussion: Every modern specialist in nutrition whose life is dedicated to human welfare must be impressed in four respects by the writings and leadership of Ellen G. White.

“In the first place, her basic concepts about the relation between diet and health have been verified to an unusual degree by scientific advances of the past decades. Someone may attempt to explain this remarkable fact by saying: ‘Mrs. White simply borrowed her ideas from others.’ But how would she know which ideas to borrow and which to reject out of the bewildering array of theories and health teachings current in the nineteenth century? She would have had to be a most amazing person, with knowledge beyond her times, in order to do this successfully!

“In the second place, everyone who attempts to teach nutrition can hardly conceive of a leadership such as that of Mrs. White that was able to induce a substantial number of people to improve their diets.

[59] “In the third place, one can only speculate about the large number of sufferers during the past century who could have had improved health if they had accepted the teachings of Mrs. White.

“Finally, one can wonder how to make her teachings more widely known in order to benefit the overcrowded earth that seems inevitable

tomorrow unless the present rate of increase of the world’s population is decreased.

“In spite of the fact that the works of Mrs. White were written long before the advent of modern scientific nutrition, no better overall guide is available today.”—Feb. 26, 1959.

As we look back over the development of the Seventh-day Adventist medical work, the place it has held, and the value it has been to the Advent Movement, as we think of the scientific confirmation of the health teachings Mrs. White set forth, may we not rightly find in all this further valid reason for believing that she possessed the gift of the Spirit of prophecy? Why should we ever allow the force of the evidence in this area to become befogged because a few extremists have at times distorted her teachings and caricatured “health reform” into a synonym for irrational views and activities? Long before most of us were born Mrs. White was aware of the danger of extremism and warned against it with vigor. Scathingly she denounced those who, with a zeal not according to knowledge, sought to pose as authorities on health and to distort her teachings to support their erratic ideas.

[60] **Chapter Nine—Schools and Foreign Missions Begin**

A large publishing work and a large medical work are not the only distinguishing marks of the Advent Movement, marks stamped there indelibly by the counsels of Mrs. White. Seventh-day Adventists have a distinctive educational work. Our first college was opened only about a decade after we organized the General Conference. That first college, located in Battle Creek, Michigan, was the start of our whole educational system that now encircles the world. Today, our youth in many areas can go all the way through from the first grade to the sixteenth, and from there on through graduate study, in a Seventh-day Adventist school. But who was the guiding spirit in this educational program? And who spoke out directly, clearly, and at length, on the kind of schools Adventists ought to have in order to justify a separate school system? The answer is, Mrs. White.

[61] There are few today who know that we had hardly more than launched the Battle Creek College than we had to close it for a time. Why? Because the one placed in charge of it quickly revealed that his purpose was to make it simply one more school of learning, a school whose main objective would be to compete with secular institutions. If there had not been Mrs. White's firm voice to speak out, our school system might quickly have destroyed itself or at least destroyed any justification for its existence.

Down through the years she wrote on true education—education of body, mind, and spirit. That writing came to full flower in her book *Education*, published in 1903. There she set forth certain principles of education that today are finally receiving endorsement from authorities in the field of education. Let us cite one specific illustration. She spoke out against the idea of requiring children of very tender years to spend long hours in a schoolroom focusing on endless books.

Today there are eminent educators who echo this thought and who declare that if children begin school a little later, when both body and nervous system are more mature and stable, they will

quickly acquire what other children have been endeavoring to secure over a period of years.

Testimony of Dr. Stratemeyer

A leading educator in mid-twentieth century is Dr. Florence Stratemeyer, for years professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University. A Seventh-day Adventist teacher, securing advanced education at Columbia University, discovered that Dr. Stratemeyer had in her reference library a copy of Mrs. White's book *Education*, and that she referred to it at times as a source of authoritative teaching. The result was that he persuaded her to give a talk to a convention of Adventist teachers in Washington, D.C. On that occasion she stood before them with the book *Education* open in one hand, expounding basic concepts of true education and referring to Mrs. White's statements in confirmation. She repeatedly interspersed comments about the remarkable book and the remarkable author. The story of this meeting appeared in the [The Review and Herald, August 6, 1959](#). In a box in that article is a statement that Dr. Stratemeyer herself made concerning Mrs. White and the book *Education*. We quote:

[62]

“Recently the book *Education* by Ellen G. White has been brought to my attention. Written at the turn of the century, this volume was more than fifty years ahead of its times. And I was surprised to learn that it was written by a woman with but three years of schooling.

“The breadth and depth of its philosophy amazed me. Its concept of balanced education, harmonious development, and of thinking and acting on principle are advanced educational concepts.

“The objective of restoring in man the image of God, parental responsibility, and the emphasis on self-control in the child are ideals the world desperately needs.”

We may presume that Dr. Stratemeyer would be well versed in the history of education and would easily recognize those views set forth in a 1903 book that were current at that time or that had been current before. Thus if Mrs. White's book on education were nothing but a reshuffling of various ideas that had a vogue in the

past, Dr. Stratemeyer would hardly have felt impressed to speak as she did concerning Mrs. White.

Surely it is reasonable for us, looking back over the years, to see in the Seventh-day Adventist educational system, and in the counsels on education that she gave to the church, a further reason for believing in her inspiration. Of course it will never be possible, in the field of spiritual matters, to provide a demonstration so full, so clear, so irrefutable, that no skeptic can harbor a doubt. It is not of the nature of spiritual matters and spiritual claims that they can be proved like mathematical formulas or test-tube experiments in a laboratory. If one desires to doubt, he will always find some basis for doubt. The choicest exhibit of this is with regard to the Bible itself.

[63] We would like to reduce the problem to this question: Is it easier to believe that Mrs. White, as a poorly educated woman, living all her life with people who largely were limited in education, gave the counsels she did simply as the result of ordinary mental effort, good guesses, and borrowings from others, or to believe that she did indeed receive visions from God? When stated in this way, we need have no difficulty in deciding how to answer.

Adventist Mission Program

Nothing distinguishes the Advent Movement more strikingly than its vast mission program, a program that envisions the whole world, a program that began in a small way at the very time that our educational work began. At that time our numbers were so few and our funds so limited that it seemed utterly fantastic even to think of a world mission work.

The thought was then current among us that we would be able to fulfill the prophetic description of the first angel's message, a message that was to go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, by preaching it to the immigrants from all lands that had come to America, and would continue to come. We reasoned that these people would send back the message to their own dear ones or carry it back on a return trip, and thus the Advent message would be spread to the four corners of the earth.

We smile at that view today, and well we may. It showed the littleness of our vision and of our faith, but let us think twice, remembering that then our numbers were pitifully small and our resources likewise. Even in the days of A. G. Daniells' presidency, which was in the twentieth century (1901-1922), there were some among us who thought him rash because he said that the day would come when our church members in the homeland would be giving on the average of a thousand dollars a day toward missions. We give very much more than that now. [64]

The Inspired Challenger

Who was it that stirred up the hearts of the brethren with the challenge of the world field? Who was it that declared to them that they must go out? Who was it that said: "I declare to you our vision must be extended. We see things nigh, but not afar off."—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 210](#). Yes, it was Mrs. White who said this. She records an experience she had in California in the year 1874 when she had "an impressive dream." You may read it in *Life Sketches*, beginning on page 208. It seems that the leading brethren were hesitant even to spread the work in California, which seemed far from Battle Creek, Michigan, which was then our headquarters. Further, they were hesitant to attempt evangelism in the large cities. Then she tells of how in her dream—a vision of the night—she heard one speak who said:

"You are entertaining too limited ideas of the work for this time. You are trying to plan the work so that you can embrace it in your arms. You must take broader views. Your light must not be put under a bushel or under a bed, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house. Your house is the world."—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 208, 209](#).

A little farther on in the chapter she declares:

"In my last vision I was shown that we should have a part to act in California in extending and confirming the work already commenced. I was shown that missionary labor must be put forth in California, Australia, Oregon, and other territories far more extensively than our people have imagined, or ever contemplated and planned."—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 209](#).

[65] To whom was Mrs. White here speaking., to ill-informed laymen out on the fringes of the Advent Movement? No. She was writing to the leaders of the work, to the best minds we had, who were directing the policies and the program of the work. How strange, how remarkable! Someone of pathetically limited education, and a woman, standing up to speak to the leaders of the work, telling them what they ought to do and how they ought to do it. Even more remarkable, they followed her counsel and the work grew and enlarged on every side. In this fact lies the explanation why the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not settle down as simply one more of a wide array of small Protestant bodies confined to America, but became, instead, ever more widely spread over the whole earth. This fact in itself is a phenomenon of no mean proportions—a phenomenon that cannot be casually explained away. We think the reader will agree that the simplest, most reasonable, most obvious, explanation is that inspired counsel guided the leadership as they increasingly moved outward to the ends of the earth.

Chapter Ten—Reading the Thoughts of Men’s Hearts

[66]

There was another significant contribution that Mrs. White made to the Advent Movement, a contribution often as dramatic as those we have already discussed. That was her endless contacts with men and institutions as she sought to give aid in hours of perplexity, a sense of direction in times of confusion, and rebuke in instances of error and evil. Her correspondence was great. All through her life she wrote the first draft of her letters by hand. Enlightened by a night vision over some problem of the church or of some individual, she would rise up to write—often long before daybreak.

The files of the White Estate, in which are found carbons of her letters since the beginning of the use of typewriters in the 1880’s, bear silent witness to her prodigious literary labors. But the really unique feature of all this was not the volume of her writing, great as it was, or the wide range of her concern, which was as wide as our world program. Rather, it was the amazing insights into human character and human problems that her letters reveal. She dealt at times with the innermost secrets of men’s hearts, for it is the secrets of the heart that are the source of all our actions.

There are those who would seek to explain away this amazing fact with the casual remark that she simply picked up gossip here and there and acted upon it. How easy the explanation! Why did we not think of it before? Why be concerned with her claims to revelation? Gossip explains it, of course. Or at least, so we are told.

[67]

But let us look again at the matter. What is, above all else, the distinguishing mark of a gatherer of gossip, who in turn acts upon his gossipy knowledge to write to this, that, and the other person? You reply, He is best distinguished as a distressing, even obnoxious character, who sows discord and ultimately loses all his friends.

But does this describe Mrs. White? No one who has any knowledge of the Adventist Church and Mrs. White would say Yes. Did she create dissension right and left, and wear out her welcome ev-

erywhere? The very opposite was the case. When she wrote letters to individuals and sometimes to churches where trouble existed, the result was generally contrite confession, revival of religious experience, victory over sin. That happened in so many, many instances, as to become rather commonplace. Does that describe a gossip?

Testimony of Mrs. White's Translator

In the early 1880's Mrs. White traveled in Europe. D. T. Bourdeau was her translator in certain countries, which gave him an excellent opportunity to observe her words and way of life. After a general meeting of Adventists in Basel, Switzerland, he wrote a report of the meeting that includes these paragraphs:

[68] "The labors of Sr. White and her son, Eld. W. C. White, were highly appreciated at this general gathering. Never was the gift of prophecy more needed, and its service more timely, than on this occasion. Errors and difficulties that had baffled human wisdom and effort were pointed out, corrected, and removed, with that tenderness, plainness, faithfulness, and impartiality which have characterized this gift during the entire period of its manifestation among us, now about forty years.

"I can say to the praise of Him from whom all blessings flow, that I was greatly helped on points that had troubled me more or less during all my religious experience; and, with difficulties removed, and light on future plans, I feel of good courage still to go forward, battling for truth, and holding up the blood-stained banner of our dear Redeemer.

"How interesting and wonderful it was to hear Sr. White correctly delineate the peculiarities of different fields she had seen only as the Lord had shown them to her, and show how they should be met; to hear her describe case after case of persons she had never seen with her natural vision, and either point out their errors or show important relations they sustained to the cause, and how they should connect with it to better serve its interests!

"As I had a fair chance to test the matter, having been on the ground, and knowing that no one had informed Sr. White of these things, while serving as an interpreter, I could not help exclaiming, 'It is enough. I want no further evidence of its genuineness.'

“Not only does this gift reprove sin without dissimulation and partiality, as did Nathan when he said to David, ‘Thou art the man;’ but it deals in words of encouragement to help those reprovèd to overcome, and to inspire hope, faith, and courage to the desponding. It not only probes the wound, but it also pours in the oil, binds the wound, and hastens the process of restoration. It brings the receiver to the Bible, and earnestly endeavors to carry out the instructions it enjoins, exemplifying in a marked degree the rare graces of modesty, true humility, and self-denial. It identifies itself with those for whom it labors, bearing their burdens in earnest, persevering prayer, forgetful of self and ease, and keeping the glory of God and the salvation of souls in view, aiming to secure these at any sacrifice. It brings with it the supernatural discernment that Peter evinced in the case of Annanias and Sapphira. It brings with it the miraculous, without which, religion were a formal, heartless, lifeless, human affair, and for want of which the masses of religionists of to-day are perishing. True to its name, it deals in prophetic utterances in harmony with the Bible, to help those who fear God to properly and speedily perform the gospel work, and to safely pass through the perils of the last days.”—In [The Review and Herald, November 10, 1885](#), p. 700.

[69]

The only comment on Bourdeau’s report that we need to make is this: Does that describe a gossip? No, we must look deeper than that shallow explanation of Mrs. White’s singular gift for describing men’s defects. What is more, no gossip produces the results that she produced with her straight testimonies to men. But let us take another illustration.

Confession of R. S. Donnell

At the turn of the century there developed in certain of the Adventist churches in Indiana a strange, unscriptural view that men in this present life could acquire “holy flesh.” Without going into details, we may say that this teaching led to certain fanatical acts, and gave promise of worse. Even the president of the Indiana Conference, R. S. Donnell, was directly involved. At the 1901 General Conference session Mrs. White spoke in clear-cut condemnation of this strange doctrine, for she ever condemned all things weird and fanatical. Present at this session was Elder Donnell. His response

was made the next day. We quote in full his words as reported in the official minutes:

[70] “I feel unworthy to stand before this large assembly of my brethren this morning. Very early in life I was taught to reverence and to love the Word of God; and when reading in it how God used to talk to his people, correcting their wrongs, and guiding them in all their ways, when a mere boy I used to say: ‘Why don’t we have a prophet? Why doesn’t God talk to us now as he used to do?’

“When I found this people, I was more than glad to know that there was a prophet among them, and from the first I have been a firm believer in, and a warm advocate of, the Testimonies and the Spirit of prophecy. It has been suggested to me at times in the past, that the test on this point of faith comes when the Testimony comes directly to us. As nearly all of you know, in the Testimony of yesterday morning the test came to me. But, brethren, I can thank God this morning that my faith in the Spirit of prophecy remains unshaken. God has spoken. He says I was wrong, and I answer, God is right, and I am wrong. Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar. I am very, very sorry that I have done that which would mar the cause of God, and lead any one in the wrong way. I have asked God to forgive me, and I know that he has done it. As delegates and representatives of the cause of God in the earth, I now ask you to forgive me my sins, and I ask your prayers for strength and wisdom to walk aright in the future. It is my determination by the help of God, to join glad hands with you in the kingdom of God.”—[The General Conference Bulletin, April 23, 1901](#), p. 422.

We ask: Would a gossipy woman, intent on creating a sensation by exposing the frailties of men, as gossips are wont to do, have elicited from Elder Donnell that kind of repentant statement? Something told him that what she said only too truly described his mistakes and his spiritual danger.

[71]

W. H. Saxby’s Testimony

We give one more exhibit of the impact of Mrs. White’s personal messages on those to whom she wrote. In the [The Review and Herald, May 18, 1916](#), Willard H. Saxby, an Adventist minister, recalled an experience of “several years ago” when he received a

testimony from Mrs. White. As was her custom at times, she sent the testimony to him through another, and trusted, minister. Here is the story in Saxby’s own words:

“Several years ago, while attending the Ohio camp meeting as a conference laborer, I received a Testimony from the servant of the Lord. It had been sent to one of our leading brethren, to be read to me. At the close of an evening meeting we retired to his tent. Elder A (for so I shall call him) said, ‘You believe in the Testimonies?’ I replied, ‘Certainly I do.’ We united in prayer, after which he slowly read the manuscript (it was in Sister White’s own handwriting). The first five pages pertained to me personally; the next six were counsels more general in character, applying specially to any one in charge of a city mission, etc.

“After Elder A had read a few paragraphs, he read a personal statement to which I objected, saying with emphasis, ‘That is not so!’ He stopped, and said, ‘Brother Saxby, you say it is so, and the Lord will help you to see that it is so.’

“‘But how can I say a thing is so when I know it is not so?’ He repeated, slowly, substantially what he had said, and continued reading. After a page or more, I said again, concerning another statement, ‘That is not so!’ He repeated, slowly, substantially what he had said, and continued reading. After a page or more, I said again, concerning another statement, ‘That is not so!’ He repeated what he had said before, talked awhile, and then resumed his reading.

“I objected four times in all; but it was on the first point that I was especially positive. [72]

“At my request, Elder A lent me the Testimony until the next day. I returned rather late to my room, and Mrs. Saxby was anxious to know why I was so late. When I told her my experience, she asked me to read the Testimony. I said, ‘No, it will take too much time tonight; but here is one paragraph I will read. I told Elder A it was not so.’ It was a matter between my wife and me; and I shall never forget how, after I had read this paragraph, she rose up in bed and said, with all the earnestness of her being, pointing to me with her index finger, ‘Willard, that is so!’

“I began to reason very seriously, like this: My wife says it is so; and Elder A, because of his confidence in the Spirit of prophecy, says it is so; and, above all, the Lord through his servant says it is

so: it must be so—three against one. As I sought the Lord by fasting and prayer, I soon saw things in the true light. The Testimony was a photograph of my inner life, and I could see that it was.

“It is comparatively easy to believe a Testimony in reproof of some one else; but to one’s own self it is altogether a different proposition, at least I found it so.

“This scripture came with force to my mind: ‘Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.’ [1 Corinthians 10:12](#). When we are sure that we are all right we may be all wrong. In our shortsightedness it is very becoming to us to walk in all humility before the Lord. ‘Believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.’ [2 Chronicles 20:20](#). I praise God for the gift of the Spirit of prophecy.”

Many like statements might be quoted, but these are surely enough to reveal the singular powers of spiritual discernment that she possessed—powers that can most reasonably be accounted for on the assumption that she possessed the gift of the Spirit of prophecy.

Chapter Eleven—Mrs. White’s Personal Life

[73]

Up to this point in our story we have purposely focused on certain of Mrs. White’s major contributions to the Advent Movement from the day when it was a frail little fragment of post-Millerism until it had grown large and strong. Now, the question naturally arises in the reader’s mind, What are the main facts about Mrs. White’s own life? What manner of person was she? Where was she born? Where did she live and labor most of her life? This chapter will seek briefly, to answer these questions.

Ellen Harmon and her twin sister Elizabeth were born on November 26, 1827, on a farm near Gorham, Maine, a little town about twelve miles west of Portland. She was one of a family of eight children. Not long after her birth her father moved into Portland, to engage in the business of manufacturing hats.

It looked first as if Ellen would grow up like any other normal girl living in a large family. But at the age of nine, as she was going home from school one day, she was struck on the face by a stone hurled by another child. For weeks her life was despaired of as she lay unconscious. For years she suffered the aftereffects of the accident. In fact, the accident so greatly weakened her, physically and nervously, that she had to drop out of school. There were dark suggestions that she was not long for this world.

[74]

She was always a deeply religious child. In 1840 she attended a Methodist camp meeting and gave her heart to God, and a little later was baptized and received into membership in the Methodist Church. It is an interesting fact that she was baptized by immersion at her earnest request. She was only about fourteen, but evidently had been a careful reader of Scripture and had deep convictions on religious matters.

About this time William Miller and other Millerite preachers were conducting meetings in Portland, Maine. Ellen’s young heart responded to the preaching of the early return of Christ to gather His own to Himself. She eagerly engaged in missionary labor. For a

religiously sensitive girl in her teens the disappointment of Christ's not coming on October 22, 1844, was a great shock. The next two months were filled with distress of spirit and bewilderment. One morning, near the close of the year, she with four other women engaged in prayer in family worship at a home in South Portland. Suddenly Ellen had a singular experience, which she described as a vision. In that vision she received an answer to some of the questions that had troubled her since October. The bewilderment began to disappear.

Firmly Believed She Had Visions

[75] She was firmly persuaded that she had not experienced an hallucination, but had truly received a vision from God. And so she proceeded, as she had been instructed in the vision, to go out and tell to others what God had revealed to her. We earlier made reference to this point in her life, noting how difficult it was for a girl, poor in health and timid in nature, to go about speaking before others. Her hesitancy was only heightened when she faced certain unstable, even fanatical people, at times—the kind of people, so religious history reveals, who are always on the fringes of any new religious awakening, ready to confuse and deceive those whom God has sought to lift to higher spiritual levels.

In August, 1846, she was married to James White, a young man twenty-five years old, who had preached during the Millerite awakening. His religious ardor was exceeded only by his poverty.

Almost immediately after their marriage they read a tract published by Joseph Bates, which presented scriptural evidence that the seventh day of the week is the true Sabbath of God. They soon accepted this and thus were quickly added to that little, but steadily increasing, company of Sabbathkeeping Adventists.

James White, though a minister, had no church, and thus no regular source of income. He had to find whatever jobs he could, such as mowing hay, cutting wood, or working on the railroad. But because Ellen White felt compelled of God to preach to the post-Millerite groups what God had revealed to her in vision, James White naturally traveled with her. Their pilgrimages were made most difficult by their deep poverty. Whatever anyone might imagine in

criticism of this young Adventist couple, no one could conceivably think that they preached for the love of money.

Their first child, Henry, was born on August 26, 1847. Three other sons were to be born over the next thirteen years. However, the youngest died after only a few months, and her first-born three years later. She had to travel, leaving the children with others. Many of her letters to her children are preserved. Those letters reveal a mother's love as normal and healthy and tender as any mother could ever display. One of the great crosses she had to bear—and she made reference to it betimes—was having to leave her children so many times when she went to visit conferences, camp meetings, and the like.

It was in November, 1848, that she had the vision of the beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist publishing work. Because of what has grown out of that vision, it may truly be described as one of the most important in a long series of visions. [76]

The Move to Battle Creek

Up until 1855 their home had been in the Eastern States. Late that year they moved to Battle Creek, Michigan. Here the Sabbath-keeping Adventists had built a small printing house and equipped it. Formerly Adventist papers and books had been printed in rented quarters.

Not long after they had settled in Battle Creek she read at church, one Sabbath evening, certain things that had been revealed to her in vision. The church felt that the counsel to which they had listened ought to be in the hands of all the Sabbathkeeping companies elsewhere. Thus was begun the publication of messages, or “testimonies,” intended directly and rather exclusively for the church. It was at this time that the word “testimony” took on a technical meaning for this Sabbathkeeping company, signifying special messages from God through Mrs. White. Did they not believe that she possessed “the testimony of Jesus Christ” which “is the spirit of prophecy” ([Revelation 12:17](#); [19:10](#))? This series of testimonies was delivered between 1855 and 1909. These were finally collected in nine volumes that filled nearly five thousand pages. The nine volumes of counsel on personal problems of different church members,

problems of churches as a whole, or of institutions, were quite apart from her varied writings that constituted books of a more general nature, some of which were particularly intended for reading by non-Adventists.

[77] In the spring of 1858 she had an extended vision that presented before her the great conflict between Christ and Satan, from the very beginning of that conflict in the past ages up to the final hour of the destruction of Satan, which looms ahead. She wrote out what she had seen in this vision and in similar visions that followed. This went through various printings and editions until, in 1888, it took on essentially its present form under the title *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*.

It was in the 1850's and through till the spring of 1863 that Mrs. White devoted certain time and writing energy promoting the need of proper church organization. To this we referred in an earlier chapter.

Not far from Battle Creek is the little village of Otsego. It was here, on a Friday evening, in June, 1863, as mentioned in [chapter 6](#), that she had a notable vision concerning the principles of health that should be employed if we would glorify God aright in our bodies. The second vision on the same general theme was given to her December 25, 1865. Out of these grew not only books on the subject of healthful living but also on medical institutions, sanitariums and hospitals, the first being the Battle Creek Sanitarium that was opened on September 5, 1866.

In the early 1870's Ellen White and her husband made a journey to California. This was to be followed by many other like journeys as they sought to keep contact with the expanding work of the Adventist Church. While she was in the West, in 1874, she received a vision that opened before her, to the stimulation of the leaders of the work, how greatly the Advent Movement must expand, not only over all North America but to all parts of the earth. January, 1875, found her back in Battle Creek taking part in the dedication of the Battle Creek College, our first major educational institution, the need of which she had urged on the leadership with earnestness.

[78] In the years immediately ahead the story was a continuing one of labors hither and yon. Very particularly did she acquire some standing among temperance organizations for her earnest lectures

on the evils of drinking. Many thousands of people in all walks of life came to hear her speak in different cities and States.

Her Husband's Death

Her husband's health, which in the late 1860's had necessitated his dropping out of regular service for a few years, worsened again. He died in August, 1881, at Battle Creek. At the time, Ellen White was lying ill at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. A few days later she was carried to the church, a short block away, to attend the funeral service. We will let her describe in her own words what happened:

“At the close of the sermon I felt it a duty to testify to the value of the Christian's hope in the hour of sorrow and bereavement. As I arose, strength was given me, and I spoke about ten minutes, exalting the mercy and love of God in the presence of that crowded assembly. At the close of the services I followed my husband to Oak Hill Cemetery, where he was laid to rest until the morning of the resurrection.

“My physical strength had been prostrated by the blow, yet the power of divine grace sustained me in my great bereavement. When I saw my husband breathe his last, I felt that Jesus was more precious to me than He ever had been in any previous hour of my life. When I stood by my firstborn, and closed his eyes in death, I could say, ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ And I felt then that I had a comforter in Jesus. And when my latest born was torn from my arms, and I could no longer see its little head upon the pillow by my side, then I could say, ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ And when he upon whose large affections I had leaned, with whom I had labored for thirty-five years, was taken away, I could lay my hands upon his eyes, and say, ‘I commit my treasure to Thee until the morning of the resurrection.’ ...

[79]

“At times I felt that I could not have my husband die. But these words seemed to be impressed on my mind: ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ [Psalm 46:10](#). I keenly feel my loss, but dare not give myself up to useless grief. This would not bring back the dead. And I am not so selfish as to wish, if I could, to bring him from

his peaceful slumber to engage again in the battles of life.”—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 252, 253.](#)

And then she added calmly: “I take up my life work alone, in full confidence that my Redeemer will be with me.”

Could anything more clearly picture her innermost character and very nature than these words? How calm the resignation to the will of God. How quiet the composure that is sustained by faith. In the light of this, how senseless sound the words of those who would seek to explain away the life of this remarkable woman by declaring that she was simply an emotionally unstable person, troubled with hallucinations, or perhaps worse, afflicted by some mental malady such as schizophrenia. One is almost tempted to feel that those who bring such charges are either grossly ignorant of her life or are themselves troubled with emotional instability.

From 1885 to 1887 Mrs. White traveled in Europe, encouraging and strengthening the newly started Adventist churches there.

She Visits Australia

[80] In 1891 she went to Australia. In that great subcontinent the Advent Movement was already planting churches. There she stayed until 1900, writing, traveling, speaking, and very particularly helping found two major institutions, a school that was later to become a large college, and a medical institution.

She returned to the United States in 1900 and bought a home about two miles from the town of St. Helena, which is situated some sixty miles north of San Francisco. She was now seventy-three years old. The years from 1901 onward were chiefly filled with writing, yet she still continued to travel. The last major journey to the East Coast was to a General Conference session in 1909.

She also gave special attention to the founding of medical institutions in California. Her crowning endeavor was found in her counsels that led to the establishing of a medical school, now incorporated as a major feature of Loma Linda University. She died July 16, 1915, at the age of eighty-seven, and lies buried beside her husband in Battle Creek, Michigan.

Well does the *Dictionary of American Biography*, in closing its rather extended sketch of her life, declare: “Her place in the

denomination was unique. She never claimed to be a leader, but simply a voice, a messenger bearing communications from God to his people. Her life was marked by deep personal piety and spiritual influence, and her messages were an important factor in unifying the [Seventh-day Adventist] Churches.”—Vol. 20, p. 98.

Chapter Twelve—Mrs. White in Vision

The preceding chapter gives a brief sketch of the life of Ellen G. White. We purposely refrained from discussing her visions. We wished only to present in simple outline the life of one who, born in humble quarters, handicapped in early life by poor health and little education, traveled so far and made so many significant contacts in the establishing of churches and institutions. Those facts in themselves are impressive, to say the least. But in the absence of visions we would not be writing this book, for it is the visions that truly set her apart from any and all leaders of the Advent Movement. It was these visions, occurring time and again through a long period of years, that gave to her words a weight of authority that nothing else could.

What of these visions, not simply the content of the counsel that she often wrote out for all to read, but the nature and the setting of the visions? Did she leave anything on record regarding the matter? Not a great deal, but enough to let us enter into some understanding of the mystery. If we may judge by accounts in the Bible, prophets said little about the physical aspects or the setting of their visions. Patently such experiences were mysterious, a contact of Heaven with earth, and rather defied a detailed description, much less an explanation in earthly terms. One of the few Biblical descriptions of a prophet in vision is given by Daniel in his tenth chapter.

We quote it not only because we can be sure that a true vision of God is described but because it provides certain parallels to what we want to say about Mrs. White. Wrote Daniel:

“Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell

upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.

“And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days. And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb. And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, and said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me” ([Daniel 10:5-19](#)).

[83]

Here is a prophet who in the light of day and in the presence of other men saw a “great vision,” a vision that took from him all his “strength,” which strength returned in stages as an angel revived him. He also declared: “Neither is there breath left in me.” During the vision an angel gave to him instruction.

This, we say, is one of the few instances where we are informed as to the physical and observable effects of a vision upon a prophet.

Most times the prophets, when they referred to having a vision, merely stated the fact, and then gave the message they had received. Again, prophets declared that they had visions as they slept at night (see [Daniel 7:1](#)). Sometimes they described the revelation as a dream. Still other times they did not specifically refer to any vision or dream but simply prefaced their message by saying the Lord had spoken unto them. It is an interesting fact that sometimes while a prophet was “speaking in prayer” God gave him a vision (see [Daniel 9:21](#)).

[84]

Descriptions of Mrs. White in Vision

With this as a background, let us look briefly at some accounts that Mrs. White and others have given concerning certain of her visions. Of her first vision, which, as we have mentioned, was in Portland in December, 1844, she writes:

“I was visiting Mrs. Haines at Portland, a dear sister in Christ, whose heart was knit with mine; five of us, all women, were kneeling quietly at the family altar. While we were praying, the power of God came upon me as I had never felt it before.

“I seemed to be surrounded with light, and to be rising higher and higher from the earth. I turned to look for the advent people in the world, but could not find them, when a voice said to me, ‘Look again, and look a little higher.’ At this I raised my eyes, and saw a straight and narrow path, cast up high above the world. On this path the advent people were traveling to the city which was at the farther end of the path.”—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 64](#).

Then follows this description of her experience after she had come out of vision:

“An unspeakable awe filled me, that I, so young and feeble, should be chosen as the instrument by which God would give light to His people. While under the power of the Lord, I was filled with joy, seeming to be surrounded by holy angels in the glorious courts of heaven, where all is peace and gladness; and it was a sad and bitter change to wake up to the realities of mortal life.”—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 68](#).

In another account of this first vision, she declared that when it closed, the angel who had attended her and spoken to her during the vision, declared:

“‘You must go back to the earth again and relate to others what I have revealed to you.’ Then an angel bore me gently down to this dark world. Sometimes I think I can stay here no longer; all things of earth look so dreary. I feel very lonely here, for I have seen a better land. Oh, that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest! [85]

“After I came out of vision, everything looked changed; a gloom was spread over all that I beheld. Oh, how dark this world looked to me. I wept when I found myself here, and felt homesick. I had seen a better world, and it had spoiled this for me.”—[Early Writings, 20](#).

Physical Effects

And what was the effect on Mrs. White physically? And, indeed, what was the effect upon the four dear women who had been with her praying? In an unpublished manuscript she wrote many years later, reminiscing on the experience, she said:

“They thought that I was dead, and there they watched and cried and prayed so long, but to me it was heaven, it was life, and then the world was spread out before me and I saw darkness like the pall of death.

“What did it mean? I could see no light. Then I saw a little glimmer of light and then another, and these lights increased and grew brighter, and multiplied and grew stronger and stronger till they were the light of the world. These were the believers in Jesus Christ....

“I never thought that I should come to the world again. When my breath came again to my body, I could not hear anything. Everything was dark. The light and glory that my eyes had rested upon had eclipsed the light and thus it was for many hours. Then gradually I began to recognize the light, and I asked where I was.

“‘You are right here in my house,’ said the owner of the house.

“‘What, here? I here? Do you not know about it?’ Then it all came back to me. Is this to be my home? Have I come here again? [86]

Oh, the weight and the burden which came upon my soul.”—Ellen G. White [Manuscript 16, 1894](#).

An Eyewitness Speaks

In the year 1874, or almost exactly thirty years after Mrs. White’s first vision, George I. Butler, prominent leader in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and eyewitness of many of her visions, wrote a long article in the church paper in which he described her in vision. He followed this by showing parallels to the experiences of Bible writers. We quote in part:

“All we ask is that people shall be reasonable. We are prepared to support by hundreds of living truthful witnesses all that we shall claim, so far as facts are concerned, of the manifestation itself, for this thing has not been done in a corner. For nearly thirty years past these visions have been given with greater or less frequency, and have been witnessed by many, oftentimes by unbelievers as well as those believing them. They generally, but not always, occur in the midst of earnest seasons of religious interest while the Spirit of God is specially present, if those can tell who are in attendance. The time Mrs. White is in this condition has varied from fifteen minutes to one hundred and eighty. During this time the heart and pulse continue to beat, the eyes are always wide open, and seem to be gazing at some far-distant object, and are never fixed on any person or thing in the room. They are always directed upward. They exhibit a pleasant expression. There is no ghastly look or any resemblance of fainting. The brightest light may be suddenly brought near her eyes, or feints made as if to thrust something into the eye, and there is never the slightest wink or change of expression on that account; and it is sometimes hours and even days after she comes out of this condition before she recovers her natural sight. She says it seems to her that she comes back into a dark world, yet her eyesight is in nowise injured by her visions.

[87]

“While she is in vision, her breathing entirely ceases. No breath ever escapes her nostrils or lips when in this condition. This has been proved by many witnesses, among them physicians of skill, and themselves unbelievers in the visions, on some occasions being appointed by a public congregation for the purpose. It has been

proved many times by tightly holding the nostrils and mouth with the hand, and by putting a looking-glass before them so close that any escape of the moisture of the breath would be detected. In this condition she often speaks words and short sentences, yet not the slightest breath escapes. When she goes into this condition, there is no appearance of swooning or faintness, her face retains its natural color, and the blood circulates as usual. Often she loses her strength temporarily and reclines or sits; but at other times she stands up. She moves her arms gracefully, and often her face is lighted up with radiance as though the glory of Heaven rested upon her. She is utterly unconscious of every thing going on around her, while she is in vision, having no knowledge whatever of what is said and done in her presence. A person may pinch her flesh, and do things which would cause great and sudden pain in her ordinary condition, and she will not notice it by the slightest tremor.

“There are none of the disgusting grimaces or contortions which usually attend spiritualist mediums, but calm, dignified, and impressive, her very appearance strikes the beholder with reverence and solemnity. There is nothing fanatical in their appearance. When she comes out of this condition she speaks and writes from time to time what she has seen while in vision; and the supernatural character of these visions is seen even more clearly in what she thus reveals than in her appearance and condition while in vision, for many things have thus been related which it was impossible for her to know in any other way.

[88]

“Peculiar circumstances in the lives of individuals, whom she never before had seen in the flesh, and secrets hidden from the nearest acquaintances, have been made known by her when she had no personal knowledge of the parties other than by vision. Often has she been in an audience where she was wholly unacquainted with the individuals composing it, when she would get up and point out person after person whom she never had seen before, in the flesh, and tell them what they had done, and reprove their sins. I might mention many other items of like nature, but space forbids. These things can be proved by any amount of testimony, and we confidently affirm that they are of such a character that they could not be accomplished by deception.”—*The Advent Review and Herald of the Sabbath*, June 9, 1874.

The reader will note some interesting physical similarities between the vision of Daniel, earlier quoted, and the visions of Mrs. White which Butler described here at length.

Significance of Physical Manifestations

[89] We have always felt that certain physical manifestations in connection with what would be described as “open visions,” that is, where there were eyewitnesses, serve a definite purpose in the plan of God—to provide the church with ocular proof of the supernatural power that was present when she had visions. Through the long centuries God has been sparing of the miraculous, but He *has* manifested it at times to strengthen men’s faith. But when there has been sufficient evidence provided for faith, the Lord does not endlessly continue to reveal the miraculous merely to pander to men’s curiosity. That, we believe, provides a simple and reasonable answer to the question, Why did Mrs. White have these “open visions” in the early decades and not later? It might be about as reasonable to ask, Why did most of the prophets, so far as the Bible record is concerned, have no spectacular open visions, but rather visions of the night?

“In the Night Seasons”

There were, indeed, times when Mrs. White, in the quiet seasons of the night, as she slept, received visions. She often began communications with such words as: “In the night season, instruction was given to me.” Then, too, there were times when quietly by herself writing or meditating or studying the Holy Word, she became aware of the presence of heavenly beings, even though her natural eyes might not see them. Here is an illustration of such divine guidance:

“Friday, March 20, 1896, I arose early, about half past three o’clock in the morning. While writing upon the fifteenth chapter of John suddenly a wonderful peace came upon me. The whole room seemed to be filled with the atmosphere of heaven. A holy, sacred presence seemed to be in my room. I laid down my pen and was in a waiting attitude to see what the Spirit would say unto me. I saw no person. I heard no audible voice, but a heavenly watcher seemed close beside me. I felt that I was in the presence of Jesus. The sweet

peace and light which seemed to be in my room it is impossible for me to explain or describe. A sacred, holy atmosphere surrounded me, and there was presented to my mind and understanding matters of intense interest and importance. A line of action was laid out before me as if the unseen presence was speaking with me. The matter I had been writing upon seemed to be lost to my mind and another matter distinctly opened before me. A great awe seemed to be upon me as matters were imprinted upon my mind.”—[Manuscript 12c, 1896](#).

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Or take this from a letter she wrote in Australia on January 1, 1900:

“The American mail goes tomorrow, and I have much to write. Have written seventeen pages since three o’clock a.m., prepared for the mail which leaves Cooranbong at nine a.m. As soon as I take my pen in hand I am not in darkness as to what to write. It is as plain and clear as a voice speaking to me, ‘I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go.’ ‘In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct (make plain) thy paths.’ We are to trust the Lord with all our heart. We have proved the Lord. We have the sure word on which we shall rely.”—[Manuscript 89, 1900](#).

This, in brief, is a picture of Ellen G. White as she received what Adventists firmly believe were revelations from God. The revelations were given to her because she was possessed of the gift of “the spirit of prophecy.”

An Inadequate Cause

To say that these visions, with their most unusual features, and all that grew out of the visions can be explained away on the basis that Mrs. White had an emotionally unstable personality, or simply “put on an act” to deceive, is too shallow, yes, too silly, an explanation to offer. The cause is inadequate to the effect, to borrow a scientific phrase. It just does not explain. This much we think is evident to anyone who is not hopelessly set to explain it all away: The visions revealed the presence of a supernatural factor. Now the question that presses immediately for answer is this, Is the supernatural power from above or below? Christ gave a sure, safe way to reach a right conclusion on a question like this. Said He: “By their fruits ye shall

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know them.” Does a person controlled by the evil one live a long life of eighty-seven years of holiness, propriety, and rectitude, mingling with all classes of people endlessly, and ever above reproach? Would a power from beneath provide spiritual guidance, counsel, rebuke, and edification, as her writings constantly did? We think these questions answer themselves and thus lead us, naturally and inevitably, to the conclusion that in some way that can but dimly be understood by the human mind, Mrs. White possessed the gift of the Spirit of prophecy.

Why should such a conclusion seem strange and unreasonable? Was it not true that in the early Christian church, as the New Testament reveals, there were prophets and prophetesses? And is it not also true that Paul, speaking of the gifts of the Spirit that Christ gave to His church after His ascension, listed one of the gifts as that of prophets? Let us read the lines: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” ([Ephesians 4:11-13](#)).

No one will say that we have already reached perfection in the Christian way and are all “in the unity of the faith.” Hence it is needful that the gift of prophecy still be displayed. Now lay this alongside the explanation earlier offered regarding the prophecy of [Revelation 14:17](#) and [19:10](#). All this leads us to conclude, not that it is strange to think that someone in our day received the gift of the Spirit of prophecy, but that it would be strange indeed if the gift had not displayed itself in our time. Indeed, the prophecy in Revelation calls for it to be revealed.

Chapter Thirteen—Mrs. White Looks Into the Future

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Most people, when they think of the word *prophet*, think of someone who is ever and anon peering into the future and making announcements of what is to come. In other words, they think of him as someone who predicts, forecasts. A great many people think that this is quite the sum and substance of the task of one who possesses the gift of the Spirit of prophecy. But this is far from the facts. Actually, when we get right down to the meanings of words, a prophet is one who “speaks for,” that is, for another. Hence, true prophets are those who in a very distinctive, unique way, speak for God in this world.

But speaking for God does not necessarily, or even primarily, imply speaking about things that are to come. Most of the problems of men’s lives, for whom God is ever solicitous, have to do, not with events that lie ahead, but with problems of the immediate present. If we read the Scriptures with this thought in mind, we see them in a new light. Inspired writers of Holy Writ possessed, it is true, the gift of the “spirit of prophecy.” But most of what they wrote and said to men dealt with important, sometimes even hard, grim, problems of the immediate hour. The prophets sought to help men to live day by day in harmony with the will of God—to avoid evil, and to seek for the good. Paul tells us what is the function of the Scriptures, which present the writings of God’s prophets: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

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Actually, only a small part of the prophets’ words in the Bible are predictive in nature. Only two of the sixty-six books of the Bible might be described as quite exclusively concerned with the future. Accordingly, the great majority of Bible writers must be measured, not by predictions and their fulfillment, but by the kind of counsel

they offered to men in current situations, plans that they presented for the strengthening and enlarging of the kingdom of God.

This is well illustrated in the life of Mrs. White. Her long ministry of speaking and writing was very largely “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Hence, in large degree, as is true of most Bible writers, her claim to possessing the gift of “the spirit of prophecy” must be measured by the quality and character of her writings and the fruitage of them in the lives of those to whom she ministered and in the organization for which she labored.

However, sprinkled through her writings are some predictions, and we wish now to call attention to certain of these, for they throw further light on the character and nature of her ministry and indeed on her claims to have revelations from God.

Time-setting Rebukes

[94] As the reader will recall, two or three remarkable predictions marked Mrs. White’s earliest days of public ministry. Let us briefly restate something found in one of the opening chapters. When all around her, Advent believers, disappointed on October 22, 1844, were looking for Christ’s appearing exactly one year later, she declared that they would be disappointed again, that Christ would not come. Why did she say that? How did she know? We leave her critics to answer this.

As a result of a vision in 1848, she declared that her husband was to publish a paper and that the publishing work thus humbly begun would finally be like “streams of light” that would go “clear round the world.” She made that forecast calmly, unhesitatingly for all men to ponder in all the days ahead. The facts are that nothing has grown so remarkably as the publishing work so feebly begun. Today we have publishing houses scattered here and there over the whole earth, with three major houses in the United States alone that are publishing some eighteen million dollars’ worth annually, to say nothing of the dollar value of all that is published overseas. What is published is to be found now in about 228 languages.

Rise of Spiritism

It was in this same year, 1848, that a most singular phenomenon occurred in the little village of Hydesville, New York, at the home of the Fox family. Strange rappings were heard. The two Fox daughters began to respond to the rappings. It seemed like a freak affair. There was nothing to indicate just what it might be, least of all to provide evidence that what was there happening was the beginning of something that would spread far and wide—something of satanic nature. But the months immediately following, while the public at large, as well as occasionally some spokesman for the press or the clergy, was offering vague and casual comments, Mrs. White on March 24, 1849, declared:

“I saw that the mysterious knocking in New York ... was the power of Satan, and that such things would be more and more common, clothed in a religious garb so as to lull the deceived to greater security.”—[Early Writings, 43](#). [95]

How did she know all this? How was she able to say that it would grow and grow, that it would take on a religious garb? How, indeed, could she say for sure that it was of Satan? All these are pertinent questions. We can answer all these easily now, but she wrote before those knockings had developed into something large and sinister.

This was the beginning of modern spiritualism, or, as it is now known, spiritism. All that Mrs. White forecast has come vividly true, particularly with regard to the spread of this phenomenon, for it has spread all over the earth. Sometimes even learned societies on psychic research have concerned themselves with the matter. Has it taken on a religious form? It certainly has, as undoubtedly all our readers know.

Following one of her early visions (January 5, 1849) she declared concerning events that would mark earth's last days: “The nations are now getting angry.” Then she added that the four angels were presently holding the four winds of strife. (See [Early Writings, 36](#).) For someone today to say that “the nations are now getting angry” or that, indeed, they are presently angry, would hardly cause anyone to raise an eyebrow, much less to express amazement about the insights of the speaker.

[96] But that was not true back in January, 1849. Far from it. Almost the whole world then subscribed to the idea that endless progress lay ahead for this earth. The ungodly believed that material progress lay ahead, and the church believed that spiritual progress loomed in the immediate future, with the Divine Spirit gradually and increasingly infusing the hearts of men until all the world would become holy. This, indeed, was the great point of conflict between the Millerites—who believed that the soon coming of Christ would bring in a better world—and all the religious and secular multitudes around them. Mrs. White, who early began to speak for the post-Millerite Sabbathkeeping group, repeatedly and clearly declared that there loomed ahead, not a better world, but increasing troubles, climaxed by great warfare and the end of the world.

A Critic Comments

Yes, in 1849 she said that “the nations are now getting angry.” No, said statesmen on every side, the nations are discovering ways of increasingly living together in harmony. No, said all the churchmen and other wise men, not war, but peace lies ahead, increasing peace, until ultimately righteousness will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Often were Mrs. White’s words held up to ridicule, for Adventists were frequently the objects of ridicule in the nineteenth century. In 1887 lived D. M. Canright, whose critical writings are the source for most subsequent critics of Mrs. White. After quoting her statement that the nations are now getting angry, Canright added immediately, with great contempt: “That was 38 years ago. It takes a long time for them to get fighting mad! Pshaw!”—*Michigan Christian Advocate*, Oct. 15, 1887.

[97] What this critic forgot, of course, was that the validity of a prophet’s words cannot always be measured in terms of thirty-eight years. Indeed, if a prophet did not speak of impending wars by angry nations until the event was almost upon us, then the opposite criticism would be heard, namely, that the prophet could already see developing what he was predicting. In other words, it is never possible to please the critic. What this particular critic did not seem to know was that in the nineteenth century there was growing in Europe something new in its history—large standing armies. Just

under the surface were developing forces that within the lifetime of some of those who had heard Mrs. White's words would break forth in terrible conflict.

Let us turn now to the year 1900 and listen to her describe impending events. There she declares, not that the nations are “now getting angry” but that “the nations are angry.” A few lines further on she adds: “While already nation is rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, there is not now a general engagement. As yet the four winds are held.”—[Testimonies for the Church 6:14](#). How true were her words, as we look back on those years! There was some rising of nation against nation. The Russo-Japanese war was to break forth shortly, and then the Balkan wars, but they could not be described as “a general engagement.” Indeed, the world at large, which was by now hopelessly committed to the idea of increasing progress and peace, refused to see in this or that military encounter anything more than the last death throes of an old order. They had no time whatever for what they declared was the farfetched idea that worldwide conflict, devastating and terrible, impended.

It was in 1911 that President Taft wrote an article under the title, “The Dawn of World Peace.” And in 1913 Dr. David Starr Jordan, one of the leading figures at that time not only in the educational world but in the World Peace Movement, declared: “What shall we say of the great war of Europe, ever threatening, ever impending, and which never comes? We shall say that it will never come. Humanly speaking it is impossible.” If the reader can stand a little more of such foolish forecasts, we would add this. In December, 1913, President Wilson said in his message to Congress: “Many happy manifestations multiply about us of a growing cordiality and sense of community of interests among the nations, foreshadowing an age of settled peace and good will.” Eight months later, when war was declared, Woodrow Wilson could only exclaim, “Incredible!”—Quoted by Kirby Page in *The Christian Century*, March 31, 1937.

Now we would ask this simple question: What if Mrs. White had been swayed in her thinking by the dominant views of those around her, as some mistakenly have charged? She would have said in 1849 and on through the years till 1914, that the nations were becoming ever more peaceful, so that soon wars would vanish. But then, how would Adventists today be able to make even a shadow of

a claim that her declarations, and particularly her predictions, were directed of God? What made her the object of high ridicule in the nineteenth century now proves to be one of the best reasons for our believing that God did illumine her mind as He illumined the minds of holy men of old who possessed the gift of the Spirit of prophecy.

A Spectacular Forecast

For good measure let us take one more statement that Mrs. White made in an article published in the [The Signs of the Times, April 21, 1890](#). We quote in part:

“The tempest is coming, and we must get ready for its fury by having repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord will arise to shake terribly the earth. We shall see troubles on all sides. Thousands of ships will be hurled into the depths of the sea. Navies will go down, and human lives will be sacrificed by millions. Fires will break out unexpectedly, and no human effort will be able to quench them. The palaces of earth will be swept away in the fury of the flames.”—Reprinted in [Messages to Young People, 89](#).

[99] What a picture to present of the years lying just ahead of 1890! How utterly fantastic, preposterous, and impossible—to employ only a few often-used adjectives—did such words sound to all the wise round about! No intellectual would believe those words, no diplomat, no educator, and few of the clergy. But in the midst of World War I that came relatively soon afterward, Mrs. White’s words sounded like a sad commentary on the world tragedy. Literally thousands of ships were hurled into the depths of the sea and navies did go down, and “the palaces of earth” were destroyed.

In her later years Mrs. White wrote ever more graphically of the days ahead right up to the coming of the Lord. Have the events unfolding in these recent decades given us any reason to believe other than that the world is in an increasingly desperate state? Are not the scientists the most frightened men of all?

Let us look at one more category of forecasts that Mrs. White made. They are found most graphically presented and in greatest detail in her book, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, a book which with the exception of secondary and technical editing

and certain notes prepared under her direction in 1911, found essentially its present text form in 1888. In the latter part of that book a picture is drawn of an apostate Protestantism in the United States uniting to enforce some of its religious beliefs on the country, and then of Protestantism reaching across an erstwhile gulf to take the hand of Roman Catholicism. Presenting a detailed picture of this would carry our story here to too great lengths. We note only two important points. When Mrs. White wrote those forecasts there was no kind of unity in Protestantism, either in America or anywhere else. Protestants were bitterly discordant. And as to reaching across a gulf to engage in any kind of fellowship with Rome, the idea would have sounded utterly fanciful.

But not so today. The twentieth century has produced some marvelous changes in the religious world. There has developed what is known as the ecumenical movement. There is a very great deal of unity in Protestantism in America today, and that unity seems to be steadily increasing. Indeed, the ecumenical movement has spread over all Christendom. And as to any Protestant group reaching across the gulf to Rome, what more remarkable developments do we have than the increasing conversations between Protestant and Catholic clergy, climaxed so dramatically in 1962, in the pope's invitation to certain Protestant leaders to attend the Second Vatican Council at Rome as unofficial observers.

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We repeat, no one at the time Mrs. White wrote her book, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, would have dreamed of these twentieth-century developments. But these developments are before our eyes today.

Now it is true that Mrs. White's labors and writings are not focused on predictions in most instances, but her limited number of breathtaking forecasts seem only increasingly impressive as we now look back over the years. And not the least of their impressiveness is this, that they strengthen the conviction that must arise in the heart of any nonprejudiced examiner of the evidence, that Mrs. White was guided by a light beyond this world. That light could have come only from God, for it is only God who knows the future.

[101] **Chapter Fourteen—Questions Some Adventists Ask**

Through the years various of our church members have asked certain questions concerning Mrs. White. This is understandable, for the presence of the prophetic gift is something singular. We find no parallel in the great Protestant communions. One of the most common of the questions raised is this: How much of Mrs. White's writings are inspired? Shall we view every word she ever spoke, every letter she ever wrote, as inspired? The question is an honest one and is entitled to a direct answer.

The Bible record of prophets leads us to the conclusion that they were flesh and blood, even as the rest of mankind are. Elijah "was a man subject to like passions as we are" ([James 5:17](#)). They were citizens in the state and in society, as well as spokesmen for God. Hence, they were not deprived of thinking ordinary thoughts or speaking or writing on ordinary subjects. But they carefully refrained from setting their own ideas before others as messages of God. Indeed, if they *had* set forth their personal ideas as if they were from God, that would have made them false prophets.

Even so with Mrs. White. She declared that certain personal, private conversations, letters, and the like, should in no way be considered inspired counsel for the church.

[102] **Moses at the Burning Bush**

On this matter the story of Moses at the burning bush has always helped us personally. God commanded Moses to take off the shoes from off his feet, for the ground on which he stood was holy. But the record does not indicate that the Lord told him the exact distance outward that the holiness extended. Nor can we imagine Moses even asking the question. Rather we visualize him as walking, shoes in hand, a very great distance, to be sure he was beyond the far perimeter of the holy ground before putting on his shoes again. Does not this incident suggest a prudent attitude of mind for us when

we contemplate the question of how far out extends the area of Mrs. White's inspired writings? As a matter of actual experience, those who have maintained this attitude seem to have found that the question of what is inspired and what is not has never really been a problem to them. Nor has such an attitude led them into queer or fanatical views.

Why Set Extrascriptural Standards for Her?

Some in the church who raise the question as to what is and what is not inspired feel they have solved the problem by declaring that they will accept Mrs. White's words as inspired when she prefaces a statement with the phrase, "An angel spoke to me," or "I saw in vision," or "an angel (or the Spirit) instructs me to say." But how do we know she is telling the truth when she says: "An angel spoke to me," or words to that effect? Our answer must be that we believe she was a truthful, godly woman, and therefore we believe her words. But if she was a truthful, godly woman why not also believe her when she declared that God gave to her the gift of the Spirit of prophecy? And when we answer Yes to this question we have removed at one stroke the objection to receiving *all* the words she has written and published for the obvious purpose of guiding the church. [103]

Is that not what we do with the Bible prophets? We believe they were indeed prophets of God and hence we accept their words. It is a simple statement of fact that many of the Bible writers do not preface their writings by declaring that an angel or the divine Spirit spoke to them, or that they had a vision. They simply proceed to present their message. For example: Paul wrote a letter to the church at Corinth about certain conditions there that had been reported to him by "the house of Chloe" (1 [Corinthians 1:11](#)). But he does not preface his writing by saying that he had a vision regarding the remedy for these particular conditions. Yet we believe he wrote by inspiration. God's prophets bear a unique relationship to Him and unquestionably, from time to time, receive special revelations on many matters. From this reservoir of inspired spiritual knowledge they can draw in dealing with many situations. All this adds up to

the conclusion that when we settle in our minds that a person has the prophetic gift, all else quickly falls into place.

This reasoning, we believe, is valid irrespective of how we view the question of the relation of Mrs. White to the Bible prophets. Remember, there is no scriptural basis for thinking that the gift of the Spirit of prophecy is one thing in Bible times, but quite another in post-Biblical times.

Who Is to Measure Agreement?

[104] There are those who feel that they will safeguard themselves in regard to Mrs. White's amazing claim to having received visions from God, by declaring: I will accept Mrs. White just as far as she agrees with the Bible. Now obviously the Bible is the yardstick by which to measure all spiritual values, and to evaluate all claims. But it does not necessarily follow that one is taking a defensible position when he declares that his acceptance of Mrs. White is in terms of her agreement with the Bible. Let us explain.

Mrs. White's unique status in the Adventist Church, let it never be forgotten, grows out of the fact that she claimed to have the gift of the Spirit of prophecy. Either that claim is true, or it is false. If it is false, why accept *anything* Mrs. White has written, even though parts of her writings may happen to agree with Holy Writ? Is it not true that error is often most appealing when it is mixed with truth? How can Mrs. White's agreement, in part, with Scripture atone for her disagreement in part—if, indeed, she does disagree? If her claim is true, it is wholly true; if it is false, it is totally false. Why keep her books in our homes if a Bible-agreeing passage might lure us on to accepting a Bible-disagreeing passage? The situation would be intolerable. We cannot rationally justify a fractional acceptance of Mrs. White's claims to inspiration.

Pursuing the matter a little further: How are we sure that something in Mrs. White's writings disagrees with the Bible? Obviously, it disagrees with *our* personal interpretation of the Bible. But are we sure that *our* interpretation of the particular text in question is the correct one? This is the heart of the matter, and reveals the weakness of the position taken. Have not devout Christians differed militantly over the meaning of various Bible texts? True—too true.

How are you sure, we again ask, that your interpretation of every text is the correct one? Is it not one of the functions of God's prophets to lead us ever into more correct understandings of the Bible? But if we rigidly take the position at the outset that our private understanding of the Holy Word is correct, how could we ever hope to be led into a truer understanding of that Word? Indeed, why would we *ever* need Mrs. White?

Alleged Contradictions

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If we state the matter baldly—as some do—and say that we will accept Mrs. White except where she *contradicts* the Bible, we bring into even better focus the question of her relation to Bible writers. One of the favorite tactics of atheists is to charge that the Bible writers contradict one another. And we must confess that such critics sometimes make out a plausible case—for a case may be plausible without being valid. Yet we are wholly unimpressed with the atheists' charge. And why? First, because we are convinced on good grounds that the Bible writers are inspired, which means that because God is the source of their writings there cannot be any contradictions. Hence we are confident that the charge of contradiction must be false, even though we may not be immediately able to expose its falsity. Second, experience has taught us that what appears at first blush to be a contradiction between writers may prove to be simply a stressing of different facets of the same truth.

Again, experience has taught us that oftentimes if only we had *all* the facts in a particular situation an apparent contradiction would disappear. We must never forget that inspired writers frequently deal with mysteries that transcend, at least in part, our comprehension. Intellectual and spiritual humility thus prompt us to view most of the apparent Biblical contradictions as exhibits of the shallowness of our spiritual understanding.

The Obvious Moral

The moral is obvious as it applies to the apparent contradictions between Mrs. White and certain Bible passages. Happily we need,

not intellectual stultification, but only intellectual humility, in order to view those alleged contradictions as simply apparent, not real.

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Mrs. White and Church Membership

There is another question that is sometimes asked: Should a person be taken into the church who does not accept Mrs. White as God's special messenger to the remnant church? We believe that the Adventist ministry in general would quickly answer, No. How could we answer otherwise? In view of the fact that such a belief in Mrs. White is one of our articles of faith, why would anyone wish to belong to our church if he did not accept Mrs. White? Would it be fair to him to bring him into the church unless, first, he well understood the doctrine of spiritual gifts, and second, was ready to accept that doctrine? Would we not be doing both him and the church a distinct disservice? Would we not be running the grave risk of later tension and discord?

Now, because we should delay baptizing a person until he understands and accepts Mrs. White, does it therefore follow that we should promptly disfellowship him in the event he might later become blurred in his faith and give up belief in her? We think not. When we take someone into the church we view him from then on as a part of the fellowship of believers, and hence we have a heightened responsibility for his soul. If one of the church family wavers on some point of belief we should seek to help him to come into full faith again, and we should continue our endeavors to help him as long as there is hope. But if discord and rebellion develop, as they sometimes do, they create a new situation that may finally require disfellowshipping to protect the peace and stability of the church.

Mrs. White and Fanatical Excesses

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Because they have seen a few Adventists who are both ardent readers of Mrs. White's writings and fanatically extreme in their ways of life, some church members inquire: Isn't it just possible that if you get to reading Mrs. White too earnestly you will become fanatical? We are never quite sure how seriously this question is raised, because these questioners surely know that a similar question

has often been raised about Bible reading. Indeed, it is a common comment by infidels that if you engage in too much Bible reading you will become queer and fanatical. And can they present some proofs? Well, proofs of a sort. For example:

Some people who have earnestly and constantly read the Bible, including what it says about handling deadly serpents with impunity, have proceeded to handle rattlesnakes to prove how true God's promises are. Some have read in the Bible what they thought was a prohibition against cutting one's hair, and accordingly have grown beards. Others have taken literally Christ's words about cutting off your hand if it offends you, or of making oneself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake. And so we might go on, even to the horrible exhibit of the father who thought he found in the story of Abraham's offering up his son Isaac a full justification for "sacrificing" his daughter. This he explained as his reason when arraigned for murder.

But do the many millions of us who believe the Bible and read it daily, find in these weird exhibits any reason for concluding that there is great danger that we may read the Bible too much? The answer, of course, is No. We all rightly say that the trouble is not with the Bible, but with the strange type of mind that certain unstable people have. And to support this obvious conclusion we properly cite the cases of endless stable, sensible Christians who daily read the Scriptures and lead beautiful, sensible, helpful lives.

The same answer may be given regarding Mrs. White's writings. The person who reads her books avidly and then reveals erratic, fanatical ways, is the same person that will read the Bible and come up with queer, irrational conduct. The trouble is not with the reading matter, but with the reader.

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One word more: A careful reading of Mrs. White's works reveals that she ever wrote calmly, exhorting us to reasonable living, and to journeying the middle of the road. In fact, in numbers of instances through the years she openly and vehemently denounced certain persons who sought to find in her writings a justification for fanatical excesses. She, herself, was a model of quiet, calm, Christian living.

Was Mrs. White a Prophet?

There are Adventists who ask: Seeing that Mrs. White did not claim to be a prophet, why should we claim she was? This question is based on a statement she made at a meeting in Battle Creek, Michigan, October 2, 1904, when she said: “I do not claim to be a prophetess.” But does that prove that she was not? Or does it, perhaps, simply prove her innate reserve and humility? John the Baptist did not claim to be a prophet, or to be the Elias that was to come. He said he was simply “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” ([John 1:23](#)). But regarding him, Christ said to the multitude: “But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet” ([Matthew 11:9](#)). Now listen to Mrs. White tell why she did not claim to be a prophetess: “Because in these days many who boldly claim that they are prophets are a reproach to the cause of Christ; and because my work includes much more than the word ‘prophet’ signifies.”—[Selected Messages 1:32](#).

Are Her Writings of Current Importance?

[109] At times certain Adventists inquire: Are Mrs. White’s writings of current importance? They seem to deal largely with incidents and experiences of the days past in our church history. It is hard to understand how anyone would ask this question and still believe that the Bible is of value today, for the Bible deals largely with events of the long ago, with Philistines, Canaanites, Hivites, and numerous other evil “ites.” It tells of ancient wars, of stiff-necked Israelites now long dead, and of civilizations long vanished. Even the New Testament tells much about theological controversies now forgotten, such as that on circumcision. Then why is the Bible spiritually significant and timely? The answer is ready: The historical incidents are simply the framework on which are hung the spiritual lessons, and it is the lessons that are important. For example, the controversy over circumcision provides the setting for the great spiritual truth that no works of the flesh avail for our salvation.

Even so with Mrs. White’s writings. There are long passages, for example, that deal with the happenings at Battle Creek Sanitarium. But they provide a setting for the presentation of principles vital to

our medical work so long as time shall last. If a book written two thousand years ago about events of that time can have a priceless quality today, why should it be difficult to believe that writings of less than a hundred years ago are spiritually valuable today? Really, the question is not *when* something was written, but who inspired the writing.

Does She Give Extrascriptural Counsels?

Finally, there are good members in the church who ask: When Mrs. White presents certain counsel that is beyond what is revealed in the Bible are we not justified in considering it simply as good counsel, such as anyone might give, and not as inspired instruction that is binding on our lives?

We believe that this question is built on a fallacy. Because we do not find in the Bible the explicit words or thoughts that Mrs. White presents, why hasten to the conclusion that her words are extrascriptural? Who would have imagined that Jeremiah's words about Rachael's weeping for her children—a comment on a tragic incident of the Babylonian captivity—had a further depth of meaning in regard to Herod's slaughter of the innocents? But an inspired New Testament writer set forth that further meaning. And is that not true of much that the New Testament writers presented? Again, who would have imagined that the doctrine of the resurrection resided in the Old Testament declaration "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Even the wisest of the Jewish doctors of the law did not see that hidden truth. But Christ made plain that the doctrine of the resurrection was most certainly hidden there.

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Why might not the same be true as to Mrs. White's writings? If we accept the prime premise that Mrs. White was inspired—and without such acceptance all our discussion in this book is profitless—then is it not reasonable to believe that she gives us, not extrascriptural teachings, but rather teachings hidden in the Scriptures? May not the trouble be simply with the dimness of our spiritual understanding?

A Specific Situation

Let us take the very specific situation that generally prompts the question before us. Some observe that the Bible permits meat eating but that Mrs. White urges abstinence from it. Therefore, they believe that Mrs. White's counsel is extrascriptural and thus not binding on us. But the Bible also permits slavery—and atheists keep us reminded of that fact. Nor do the apostles raise their voices calling on masters to free their slaves, or rallying slaves to revolt. And atheists keep us reminded of that also. But what of Mrs. White? From almost the beginning of her public life she thundered against what she declared was the sin of slavery. Incidentally, even as she [111] began to speak out there were almost half of the clergy in the United States who declared that slavery was a part of the divine plan and wholly justified by Scripture.

Now was Mrs. White extrascriptural, simply offering us counsel that was “good,” or otherwise, depending on our personal mood in the matter? None of us would say so today. We would vigorously declare that she was setting forth the original plan of God as pictured in the story of Eden, and also pointing us forward to the ideal in the earth made new.

Because God permits something, it does not follow that that is the ideal. Take, for example, the Mosaic permission for divorce. Christ declared that such permission was given because of the “hardness” of the hearts of the Israelites. But He immediately added that this was contrary to the original plan of God for man. (See [Mark 10:2-9](#).) Christ's words apply to all the permissives of Scripture that seem so strangely different from the original Edenic picture, or the ultimate picture of Eden restored. Our dim vision, our unheavenly heritage, and other factors explain the permissives. But such permissives do not warrant our concluding that Mrs. White does not offer us inspired instruction because, forsooth, she lifts our eyes above the permissives to the ideal. And should that not uniquely be the mark of a prophet who seeks to prepare us for the better world so soon to come? And in that better world, even as was true in original Eden, there will be no flesh eaters. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain” ([Isaiah 11:9](#)).

There is nothing extrascriptural in the advocacy of vegetarianism. That was the diet set down in Eden and will be the diet in Eden restored. And no permissives of Scripture change that fact. Remember that the permissives permit not only flesh but also strong drink, easy divorce, plural marriages—to mention some of the more startling. And these permissives reveal, not the standards of a gross God—as atheists charge—but the long-suffering and patience of a holy God. They certainly do not offer to us any permanent standard for life or any justification for living below the level of the light that has been revealed to us.

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Ever and anon God's prophets seek to lift us to higher levels, to help us to set our "affection on things above" ([Colossians 3:2](#)). And in doing that they do not depart from all that Moses and the prophets wrote. They simply build for us steps of divine principles that would lead us above the sad level of permissives to the high level of the heavenly country.

Reasons for Questions

The fact that Adventists ask certain questions regarding Mrs. White does not mean that there is widespread doubt or uncertainty among us regarding the divine gift of the Spirit of prophecy. Far from it. Adventists rejoice that God once more has graciously given to His people this great gift. But seeing that it is so rare, and nowhere else manifested in our age, it is natural that varying questions should arise in the minds of some, particularly those just entering the church. Indeed, it is for the special help of the latter that this chapter is written.

Yes, it is natural that questions should be raised, at times, even by the most devout. God gave us the faculty of asking questions. But for our own protection let us never forget that all our faculties are subject to the bombardment of the evil one, and that he also can prompt questions. We shall never be free of dangers as we travel the road heavenward. Some of us will be tempted to let various questions blur the clear view of the road ahead. Others, though seeing clearly the road, will be tempted to try to rein up everyone to walk straightly according to their particular interpretation of the counsels God has graciously given us through the Spirit of prophecy.

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Their interpretation of inspiration on a certain point may be right, but their way of trying to bring conformity on that point may be woefully wrong. The result is discord. We all need, by God's grace, to discover winning ways to present our view of what an inspired passage means. Only thus can we come into the desired unity of the faith. As we journey the upward way let us use the Spirit of prophecy, not as a club with which to force others into conformity with us, but as a staff to help our own faltering feet along the heavenly road.

Chapter Fifteen—The Price of Spiritual Leadership [114]

Throughout her life Mrs. White faced criticism by those who were hostile to the Advent Movement. They saw in her a chief spokesman for the movement, and so focused their criticisms on her. In the late 1880's a man named D. M. Canright left the Adventist ministry and soon began to write against Adventism in general and Mrs. White in particular. And as earlier stated, his writings have been the basis of most of what has later been written against her.

The mere fact that various persons have written against her has in itself created doubts in the minds of some people who would otherwise be favorably disposed. They seem to reason that surely if a person is a good Christian, living a wholly upright life, he would not be the object of such attacks, nor could any plausible charges be brought against him. But on second thought we all know that the price a great, good leader always pays is the price of criticism, sometimes even vicious attack. No great man who ever lived escaped criticism, and often the greater, the finer, the man, the more bitter the attacks. Certainly the Bible prophets did not escape, nor did our Lord, who was harshly described as one who dined with publicans, sinners, and winebibbers.

Attacks on the Bible [115]

Yes, Mrs. White's writings have been attacked and held up to ridicule, but so has the Bible. Perhaps no book has ever been attacked so viciously, so vehemently, so repeatedly, as the Bible. And how wide a range the attack covers. Some critics describe Bible writers as epileptics, or at least hysterical creatures, who borrowed other men's thoughts. They ask, for example: Do not Moses' laws, even the very phrasing of them, sound strangely like the great code of Hammurabi, which appeared long before Moses' day? Bible writers are accused of having expressed only the thoughts of their day on astronomy, for illustration, and on various other matters. The

critics look at the Old Testament permissives in the matter of slavery and plural marriage, to say nothing of the divine order to kill men and women and children in certain of the Palestinian wars, and then level the horrible charge that the Bible is an immoral book. It seems dreadful even to summarize these charges.

But we who are Christians do not see the Bible that way. We approach it from a different viewpoint, with different glasses on, with a different understanding of God and His purposes, and see in the Holy Book what it claims to be—the Book of God that can guide us safely to heaven.

Why then should we be disturbed by seemingly plausible arguments against Mrs. White and her writings, arguments that do not sound half as overwhelming as some of those brought against the Bible? Let us never forget that plausibility is not to be confused with validity. An argument can be plausible and still be wholly untrue.

A Strange Claim

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There are those who claim that a man like Canright, for example, who lived and labored for a time with Elder and Mrs. White, was more competent to speak of her than any of us who have lived later, because he was actually there. He heard her speak. He knew many facts firsthand. Here certainly is an exhibit of a plausible argument. But let us test it out. The dreadful attacks that have been made upon many great men of past centuries were often made by critics who lived in their own day, in their own community, and who knew them well. But did that prove that these critics were thus uniquely qualified to speak authoritatively as to the worth of these great men? We all answer emphatically, No. Does the mere fact that a critic lives in the same day and in the same city as does the great man mean that he is devoid of prejudices and hatreds, and is capable of arriving at dispassionate, accurate conclusions? Again we answer emphatically, No.

To be specific, take the case of Lincoln, one of the greatest of good men known in American history. If we accept the plausible argument before us, members of Lincoln's cabinet were the ones best prepared to give us an accurate picture of him, for did they not live with him and listen to his voice? But once again, and with the

greatest of vehemence, we answer, No. If we were to let certain of these men with their deep-seated prejudices and antipathies paint the picture of Lincoln, it would be a sorry, grotesque one. We feel, rather, that men living in later years, who have access to all the historical sources, who can calmly read the record, whose pulses are not quickened, whose temperatures are not raised by the surging passions of that day, can see Lincoln more clearly, can understand him more truly, and can provide us a portrait more accurate.

The Heaviest Price

Speaking of the price of spiritual leadership, the very fact that Mrs. White declared that God had given to her visions was perhaps the heaviest price she had to pay. At the beginning of this book [117] we referred briefly to the spiritual uncertainty through which even loyal members of the Advent Movement passed as they considered accepting Mrs. White's claim that God had given to her visions. Their very questioning was inevitably a source of spiritual distress to Mrs. White. But it was as nothing compared to the questioning, yes, and the ridicule, that came from critical onlookers. To them the very idea that she claimed to have the gift of the Spirit of prophecy was enough to brand her either as a fraudulent, crafty deceiver, or a weak-minded, deluded fanatic. In other words, the claim in itself was a condemnation.

The reasoning of the critical onlookers might be summed up thus: The world has ever been troubled with false prophets, people who for one reason or another have said strange things and led men astray. Various patently false movements have claimed to have a prophet as a leader. Therefore the Seventh-day Adventist Church that Mrs. White helped to create is simply one more exhibit of a false religious movement, and she, of a false prophet.

But such reasoning, though plausible, has the fatal defect of failing to take note of certain scriptural facts. First: Through the long ages of Biblical times, the distinguishing mark of God's *true* movement in the world was the presence of prophets who spoke for God and led His people. Second: The gift of prophecy is one of the gifts of the Spirit for the church in post-Biblical days. (See [1 Corinthians 12:7-10](#); [Ephesians 4:11-13](#).) Third: The Bible specifically declares

that the gift of the Spirit of prophecy is to be a distinguishing mark of the “remnant” people of God when Satan, the “dragon,” is making his last attempts to overthrow God’s truth in the earth. (See [Revelation 12:17; 19:10](#).)

[118] We did not have to wait for the critical-minded to tell us that the world has ever been troubled with false prophets. Bible writers have related this sorry fact many times and have warned against the danger of listening to such prophets. But do they hasten on to declare that all who claim the prophetic gift are frauds? No. How could they without branding themselves frauds? On the contrary, the apostle John declared, “Try the spirits whether they are of God” ([1 John 4:1](#)). And the mighty evangelist Paul, who more than once raised his voice against impostors, emphatically admonished the church, “Despise not prophesyings” ([1 Thessalonians 5:20](#)).

From these and many other passages of Scripture we rightly conclude that the prophetic gift belongs in the true church of God, even to the end of time. And we believe that when we “try the spirits” we may rightly conclude that Mrs. White proves to be, not a fraud, but someone who is in the true prophetic succession.

Chapter Sixteen—Two Typical Objections Considered

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Probably no objection to the work of Mrs. White has been more common than this: Adventists consider Mrs. White's writings as another Bible, and she aids and supports this false view. Here is a criticism that strikes both at Mrs. White and at the movement that believes in her. We willingly grant that this criticism is often honestly, though mistakenly, made.

In answer, let us first restate a few facts earlier set forth: Mrs. White most certainly claimed that God gave to her the gift of the Spirit of prophecy, and very specifically, that God gave to her visions. God gave to the Christian church, as one of the gifts of the Spirit, the gift of prophecy. The Bible foretells that God's last people in the world will have in their midst the "testimony of Jesus Christ," which is "the spirit of prophecy" ([Revelation 12:17](#); [19:10](#)). Hence there is nothing unscriptural in the idea of prophetic guidance in the church in our times. This important point should be clearly understood before we go further.

But because we believe that we have divinely inspired guidance for our day do we therefore believe we have another Bible, a substitute for what Christians have had through the long centuries? The answer is No.

While it is true that God saw fit to have the writings of certain prophets preserved in what we describe as the Holy Scriptures, it is also true that He raised up other prophets to give timely, inspired messages for particular moments in earth's history. (See, for example, [Exodus 15:20](#); [Judges 4:4](#); [2 Samuel 7:2](#); [2 Kings 22:14](#); [Luke 2:36](#); [Acts 21:8, 9](#).) The fact that their writings were not drawn into the canon of Scripture does not make these men of God less than prophets, or their writings less than inspired.

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The Record Is Clear

From the earliest days of the Seventh-day Adventist Church both the church leadership and Mrs. White have been on record that her writings are not to be viewed as a new Bible, a kind of substitute for the Holy Scriptures. Listen to these words of James White, husband of Ellen G. White, that he wrote in 1847:

“The Bible is a perfect and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice. But this is no reason, why God may not show the past, present, and future fulfilment of his word, in these *last days*, by dreams and visions; according to Peter’s testimony. True visions are given to lead us to God, and his written word; but those that are given for a new rule of faith and practice, separate from the Bible, cannot be from God, and should be rejected.”—[A Word to the Little Flock, 13](#).

Lack of space prevents our quoting a long array of similar statements by other church leaders through the years that are written in the same tenor.

But let us quote, now, a statement by Mrs. White herself. Her first published work, which appeared in 1851, climaxes with these words:

[121] “I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the ‘*last days*’; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth.”—[Early Writings, 78](#).

This was the unchanging position she took throughout her life. We may rightly conclude, therefore, that neither Mrs. White nor the church leadership hold up her writings as another Bible, a kind of substitute for the Holy Word. It is an interesting fact that the publishers of Bibles declare that Seventh-day Adventists are perhaps their best customers—an incomprehensible state of affairs if we had adopted a substitute for Holy Writ.

A Second Objection

A second objection, perhaps the most plausible of all, is this: Mrs. White was influenced to some degree in her speaking and

writing, her actions and attitudes, by those around her. We have already referred to this charge in a general way. We wish now to deal with a specific exhibit, the one routinely cited by critics. Mrs. White wrote that she once released for publication a testimony—the text of a vision—earlier than she had planned to do, because of pressure from other persons. Critics offer this admission as a shining proof that Mrs. White did not possess the prophetic gift.

Now those who bring such a charge seem to give evidence of close familiarity with the Scriptures, and certainly they affirm a great belief in them. Have they forgotten those instances of how holy men, men who were truly prophets and who wrote for our instruction, were influenced by others in certain of their actions?

There was Elijah. No prophet was greater than he, for on a certain notable day he called down fire from heaven, holding at bay the surly, sullen hosts of Israel. But late that day, as he sat exhausted by the wall of Jezreel, a messenger from Jezebel brought to him the tidings that she intended to lift his head from his shoulders. Was he influenced by this? Was he! He was influenced all the way down to his feet, and fled for his life. Perhaps no spokesman for God ever had a more sorry anticlimax to a day of mighty power than Elijah. And all because he had allowed himself to be influenced. Further, when he reached the wilderness and fell into conversation with his God, he made a sorry mathematical blunder. He declared, “I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it.” But the Lord corrected him immediately, declaring that He had seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal.

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Now does it ever occur to any good believer in the Bible and its holy prophets to feel that because of all this Elijah was not a great prophet of God? Not at all. We all wish that he had not been so influenced by Jezebel’s messenger and had not set out in such terrified flight to the wilderness. We also wish he had not thought that he alone was left. But we do not believe that he therefore forfeited his claim to being a prophet.

Because a prophet has revelations from God it does not follow that he therefore has *all* knowledge concerning *all* things. Or because a prophet, in his own personal experience, is influenced by some other person, it does not mean that he is not an inspired messenger for God. We should never forget that inspiration is a divine gift to

particular human beings that they may give to men certain revelations from God. But this does not mean that prophets are infallible and thus inherently beyond the possibility of all error in word or *action*. Infallibility is an attribute of God alone. That is the lesson to learn from Elijah.

[123] Or take a New Testament illustration. There was the apostle Peter, mighty evangel for God. The Bible tells us: “For before that certain came from James, he [Peter] did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision” ([Galatians 2:12](#)). It is pathetically evident that Peter was influenced in some of his actions by certain persons who “came from James.” It is a sad incident. Paul “withstood him to the face,” the Bible declares, “because he was to be blamed.” But does any believer in the Bible declare that therefore Peter was not an inspired man of God? No! His writings are a part of the New Testament canon.

Now if Peter and Elijah, though influenced by others in certain of their actions, can still be considered prophets of God, why not also Mrs. White? The question is as simple as that.

Space limits forbid our discussing further questions.

Why should we need to? The reader can judge from the foregoing typical ones as to how weighty the others might be. There are honest questions and there are critical objections. The great fallacy underlying most of the criticism of Mrs. White is this: The critic first draws a picture of what *he* thinks a prophet ought to be. If in any particular Mrs. White does not agree with the picture, this proves to his complete satisfaction that she was not a prophet of God. But how can he prove that his portrait of a prophet is an accurate one? He cannot. He drew it largely from his own imagination and finite reasoning, which is a charitable way of saying he could be sorely mistaken. Prophetic inspiration is a mystery, and on this mystery the Bible throws little light. A person makes an amazing claim, indeed, when he declares he is qualified to paint a detailed portrait of a true prophet of God.

Chapter Seventeen—Looking Back Over the Record [124]

And so we come to the end of this brief sketch of the life and work of a most remarkable religious leader, Ellen G. White. The very brevity has, of course, made it impossible for us to do justice to the subject. But enough, we trust, has been given to lead the reader to the firm conviction, if he has not already reached it, that Mrs. White was not simply one more fervent religious leader, but rather one possessed of the gift of the Spirit of prophecy. We believe this conviction will grow as he continues to read her writings, which have a distinctive quality that often impresses readers at the outset.

For illustration: Nearly seventy years ago, in a village in Australia lived a young couple. They had never heard of Mrs. White, or of Seventh-day Adventists, or of the *Review and Herald*, the official organ of this Adventist Church. One day they found by the roadside a mud-spattered copy of a paper. Reading matter was scarce, so they took the paper home and dried it out by the kitchen stove. It was a copy of the *Review and Herald*. In the quiet of their little cottage amid the eucalyptus trees, they turned the pages of this unknown journal from America. They read an article on tithing. They were impressed that whoever the publishers were, they must be most earnest, sacrificial people, because they believed in giving God one tenth of their income—a tithe—besides freewill offerings. Who could these people be! They further leafed the pages, read an article by a Mrs. E. G. White, and exclaimed: “Who is this Mrs. White? She writes as though she is inspired.” [125]

A few days later a villager who sold fresh vegetables stopped at their door. “Do you know about a paper called the *Review and Herald*?” they asked. When he answered, “Yes,” they promptly inquired: “Do you know about a Mrs. E. G. White?” He did. “And who is she?” they asked. He hesitated, evidently fearing if he answered them directly he might prejudice them against Adventism. But his hesitancy only made them the more insistent. Finally, fixing his eyes on them, he answered with fervor: “She’s a prophet.”

Their interest only increased, for his words simply reinforced the conviction that had gripped them in the quiet of their humble cottage. Not long afterward they were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their faith in the church, and particularly in Mrs. White, only increased with the years. And that faith they passed on to their son, present editor of the *Review and Herald* and the writer of these lines.

This little drama enacted in faraway Australia has been many times duplicated in different lands as men and women have found that their strongest reason for believing in the prophetic status of Mrs. White is the internal evidence that her writings present.

[126] Paralleling this weighty evidence is that provided by the fruitage of her long labors. The rule set down by our Lord is still good: “Ye shall know them by their fruits” ([Matthew 7:16](#)). The fruitage of Mrs. White’s speaking and writing can be examined by all the world. We earlier discussed how she led out in every major project of the steadily growing Seventh-day Adventist Church, that indeed her counsel regularly took the church safely through various crises. It passes credulity to believe that a frail, almost uneducated woman could have been able through the long years to take the leading role she did in the life of the church, and give to the world numerous books of great spiritual depth, unless she had been uniquely illumined of Heaven.

This reminds us of a conversation we had some twenty years ago with an aged leader in the Advent Christian Church. This church is the one remaining segment of the First-day Adventists, coming down through the century from Millerism, that is of any size. The other segments have all virtually dwindled to the vanishing point. The Advent Christian Church was organized about the same time as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and their membership, as their published statistics reveal, has remained almost exactly at the 30,000 point since the turn of the century.

Aided by this aged Advent Christian leader, we had been making a special study of William Miller’s writings that are found in the Advent Christian College at Aurora, Illinois, of which college he had formerly been president. He had been most gracious to us. We had days of sweet fellowship together, and at times I dined at his home. He knew of the amazing growth of Seventh-day Adventists,

of the different branches of our work that spread over the earth. As we drove along at sunset one evening in his car, he said to me in substance:

“Your church leaders through the years have been wiser men than ours. They saw the need of a publishing work and started it, the need of medical work, of educational, and of a great mission program. They also saw the need of a close-knit organization. And so today you are strong and growing fast, while we are not.”

I replied: “No, my dear brother, I don’t think that is quite an accurate statement. Our leaders were not wiser than yours, nor more far-visioned. The record will show that they were ordinary flesh and blood, like your men, with great limitations of vision and faith. But we had in our midst a most singular woman. She marked out what we ought to do in the different branches of our work. She was specific, emphatic, insistent. We accepted her counsel and direction, for we believed she had visions from God. That is the reason we have this marvelous organization and why we’ve grown.”

[127]

A great silence descended, for the dear Advent Christian people have ever been critical of our doctrine that Mrs. White possessed the gift of the Spirit of prophecy. So we rode on in silence for a time. What his thoughts were, we know not. Finally he remarked, with a gesture toward a grove of trees: “Are not the trees beautiful at sunset?” I agreed. The silence was broken, and our fellowship continued—continued, we are glad to say, until his death.

We can think of no more impressive testimony to the singular qualities of Mrs. White than that so eloquently, though unwittingly, given by this dear man.

A Personal Testimony

Let me close this book with a personal testimony. We set out, years ago, to examine in detail all the major criticisms that had been framed against Mrs. White and to prepare, if possible, a book that would answer them. The task took much time, as might well be imagined. When we had finished we made a statement to the special committee set up by the church to examine the prepared manuscript. In substance we said:

[128] “I have examined all the major criticisms of Mrs. White that I could find in any book or pamphlet, checking back on all the alleged historical declarations and going to the original sources for the accurate text of all statements by Mrs. White. I have also examined many facts regarding her life. Having completed my task by preparing the extended manuscript now before you, I wish to offer this testimony: I end this work fully and irrevocably persuaded in my mind and heart that Mrs. White was what she claimed to be, a humble handmaiden of God, to whom He gave revelations, authoritative and unique, to guide and direct the Advent people in these last days.”

That same testimony we would offer today.

We honestly believe that anyone who candidly and prayerfully examines the record of her life and writings will likewise testify.